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Casting of Nets

By

Richard Bagot

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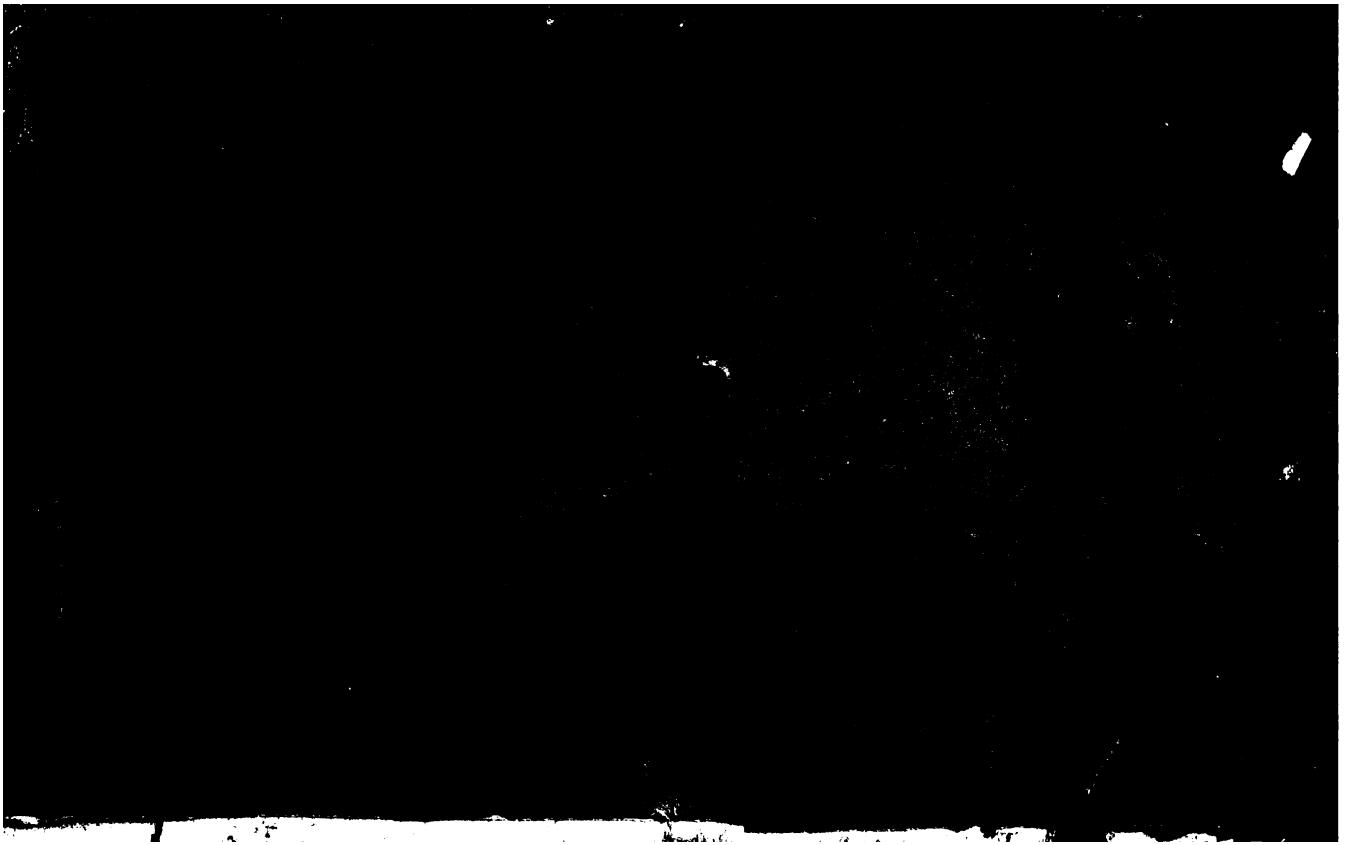

and shivered through the patches of grass as yet uncut, and the Rector lingered for a space, enjoying the quiet pastoral beauty of the scene, and glancing, too, with a certain satisfaction at the heavy crop of hay, a considerable portion of which was on his own glebeland.

Suddenly the look of tranquil content upon his features changed, to be replaced by one of impatience, almost of annoyance.

From a mass of gray buildings beyond the river, just discernible among the trees surrounding it, the deep tone of a single bell floated up with the breeze.

One—two—three; one—two—three; one—two—three; and then a longer pause, and nine strokes, repeated at equal intervals.

The Rector of Abbotsbury listened, and his face wore the expression of one who wakes from a pleasant dream to find himself confronted by an unpleasant reality.

'The *Angelus*,' he said to himself, half aloud; and then he turned and continued his walk through the churchyard, and passed through a little gate which led into the Rectory garden. The Rectory at Abbotsbury was a pleasant abode enough. The house, indeed, more resembled the residence of a country squire than that of a clergyman. The solid, square building stood above a terraced garden looking over the Valley of the Trent and across a rich agricultural country to th heather-clad ridge of Cannock Chase on the opposit horizon. The interior of the house was entirely oak panelled, the rooms spacious and well furnished Everything at Abbotsbury Rectory bore silent bu unmistakable testimony to the fact of Abbotsbury bein

a good, solid family living, which had been enjoyed by respectable younger sons for many generations. Behind the house and garden rose groups of noble trees, with here and there a venerable oak standing majestically apart from its fellows. Beneath spreading branches, still green with the midsummer shoots, could be caught glimpses of undulating park-land, where shorthorns and Alderneys were feeding knee-deep in the luxuriant herbage, and beyond were great woods stretching away as far as the eye could see.

Abbotsbury possessed the evident stamp of being the ancient abode of an ancient family, and the Rectory, which lay just beyond the grounds surrounding the big house, was, as it were, an inseparable part of the Abbotsbury domain.

The Redmans of Abbotsbury had lived on their own lands since Saxon times, and when Sir Walter Redman accepted a peerage from George III. in the early years of that monarch's reign, and became known by the style and title of Baron Redman, of Redman's Cross in the county of Stafford, the general impression in Staffordshire was that he conferred a favour on his Sovereign and his country by condescending to enter the Upper House. Redman's Cross, which gave the family its title, was the original dwelling-place of the race, the Redman of the day having somewhere far back in the fourteenth century married the heiress of Abbotsbury, after which they moved their residence to the latter place. Redman's Cross fell into ruin in the midst of the wild chase surrounding it, where herds of deer wandered at will through its forest glades and among the mighty oak-trees for which it had been famous even in Norman times. The present Rector

of Abbotsbury was the first for many years to hold that office who was not a Redman by birth. From time immemorial the charge of souls at Abbotsbury had been committed to a younger son of the great house, and when the Rev. James Russell was appointed to the living on the death of the old Rector, the villagers, who had been accustomed for generations to be christened, married, and buried by a Redman, had been inclined to resent Mr. Russell's ministration as an impertinent intrusion of a stranger into their domestic affairs.

There had been no Redman, however, to succeed to the Honourable and Reverend Richard, the late Lord Redman's brother, who had held the living for nearly forty years, when he died from a chill caught while fishing for grayling on a treacherous day of mid-winter; so his nephew, the present peer, had bestowed it upon James Russell, his second cousin by marriage.

The latter was eminently fitted, so far as presence and natural taste were concerned, to live in the stately, oak-panelled Rectory-house, which bore about it the atmosphere of the old-fashioned Tory and High-Church principles of the early part of the nineteenth century. As he walked across the lawn from the churchyard gate, and slowly ascended the broad flight of gray stone steps flanked by vases of scarlet geranium and blue lobelia which led to the terrace above, Mr. Russell presented a typical example of a well-bred and well-educated English clergyman.

He was about to enter his own study by the large bay-window which opened on to the garden, when his wife called to him from beneath the trees at the further end of the terrace.

'James,' she cried, 'tea is out here. How late you are! I will send for some fresh tea for you.'

The Rector turned, and went to where a tea-table and some garden-chairs were placed beneath an old chestnut-tree.

'Yes, I am late,' he replied, taking one of the chairs and drawing it nearer the table. 'Mrs. Clutterbuck is very bad; she won't last out the night, I think. I have been with her all the afternoon.'

'Poor thing!' said Mrs. Russell, looking critically at the tea she was pouring out. 'No, James; this tea is much too strong. You know strong tea always gives you indigestion. I will go and ring for George to bring some more.'

'Do,' replied the Vicar; 'it was very hot walking back from Clutterbuck's farm. A cup of tea is just what I want. Ah! here are the papers. Let us see what the *Times* says.'

He opened the newspaper as his wife disappeared into the house, and settled himself down to glance over its contents.

Presently he gave an exclamation of astonishment and dismay. A short paragraph of two or three lines among the personal intelligence in the *Times* had caught his eye.

'A marriage will shortly take place between I
Redman and Hilda, daughter of Lady Gwendolen
the late Mr. Cawarden, of Cawarden.'

'Mary'—Mr. Russell called out excitedly t
—'Mary, never mind the tea; come he
What do you think has happened?'

Mrs. Russell heard him from the
window, where she was giving directions
and came leisurely along the terrace.

'What do you think has happened?' he repeated, as she approached him.

'I don't know. What? Another ritual scandal?' she asked.

'Worse than that,' replied the Rector—'a great deal worse than that. Read that announcement,' he added, handing her the newspaper.

Mrs. Russell's face assumed a look of lively interest as she read the paragraph.

'I don't know what you mean, James,' she said, after a pause; 'I should think it was an excellent thing. Redman ought to have married a long time ago.'

'An excellent thing!' exclaimed her husband; 'it is a terrible thing—a—an abominable thing!'

'Why? Is Miss Cawarden not—not a nice person? It is a good name. I have often heard of the Cawardens of Cawarden.'

'It is a good name enough,' said Mr. Russell irritably —'as good as Redman, if it comes to that—but the Cawardens are Roman Catholics.'

Mrs. Russell looked genuinely shocked.

'Romanists!' she exclaimed. 'Oh, James, no wonder you said it was a terrible thing! It should be stopped,' she continued. 'Can't it be stopped, James?'

'My dear Mary,' the Rector replied, 'Redman is old enough to know his own mind, and nobody has any right to interfere. They are everywhere,' he added, a little irrelevantly; and he looked beyond the churchyard to the spot in the valley where the *Angelus* had rung a short time before.

'What can have induced him to do it?' said Mrs. Russell. 'Poor dear Walter!' she continued, with a little sigh, 'this is what comes of having no religion.

If he had only been a good Churchman, he could never have done such a thing. But I don't think he believes in anything. One good thing is, that he is all the less likely to be perverted by his wife.'

The Rector looked amused for a moment. Of the two Mrs. Russell was the stauncher Protestant.

'I don't know that we ought to call it perversion if she makes him a believer in something,' he said mildly.

'Think of Abbotsbury falling into the hands of Romanists! Of course it is very sad that Walter should be so indifferent to religion, but you surely wouldn't wish him to become a pervert to Rome, James?'

'Abbotsbury will probably fall into the hands of Roman Catholics whether he does or not,' remarked Mr. Russell. 'He will have to consent to his children being brought up in his wife's religion, otherwise the Roman Church will not allow the marriage.'

'It is perfectly monstrous!' exclaimed his wife; 'they treat us as if we were heathens.'

'It is the inflexible spirit of Roman Catholicism,' returned the Rector. 'After all,' he added, with a sigh, 'their attitude is logical—more so, perhaps, than our own.'

'Arrogance, I call it, not logic.'

Mr. Russell shrugged his shoulders.

'I think it is logical,' he replied. 'At all events, they stick to their position, which is more than we are able to do to ours.'

'It will be a very unpleasant situation for us,' said Mrs. Russell. 'I suppose that Lady Redman will ignore us.'

'She can scarcely do that, my dear.'

'Oh, I don't mean socially, of course; but she will ignore your position as Rector of Abbotsbury. It is enough to have that monastery in the parish, but now that there is to be a Romanist reigning at the Hall——' and the Rector's wife paused expressively.

'Perhaps,' remarked her husband, 'Miss Cawarden may be a tolerant person. She can't help having been born a Roman Catholic. Indeed, having been born one, she is far more likely to be broad-minded than if she were a con—a pervert.'

'She will want to turn her husband,' said Mrs. Russell, 'and she will not be pleased at finding an Anglican priest at her very door. Mark my words, James, it will be a very disagreeable position for us.'

A servant brought some fresh tea, and the Rector poured himself out a cup of it.

'You couldn't blame her for wanting her husband to belong to her faith,' he said presently.

'N—no,' answered Mrs. Russell doubtfully; 'I suppose not. But it would be much better if Walter converted her to his own——'

'But if he has none?'

'Oh, you know what I mean, James,' said Mrs. Russell a little impatiently. 'Walter is nominally a member of the Church of England, and of course his wife should be so too. Who knows?' she added hopefully. 'Perhaps she will become one.'

The Rector shook his head.

'Very few people leave Rome for Canterbury and Downing Street—women especially,' he remarked. 'Besides, who is to convert her? Not her husband, certainly.'

'You!' said Mrs. Russell triumphantly.

'I? My dear Mary!'

'Certainly. You are the priest of her future husband's parish, where she will be in the position of a dissenter.'

'There are a good many of them in my parish,' muttered Mr. Russell, thinking of the Dominican Fathers and their monastery in the valley near by.

'It doesn't say when the marriage is going to be,' said Mrs. Russell, glancing again at the *Times*.

'It will be very soon, I should imagine. We are only at the beginning of July. Probably they will be married at the end of the London season, and we shall have them here in the autumn, after the honeymoon.'

'And then,' said Mrs. Russell, 'you will have to begin to prepare the ground for the conversion.'

The Rector of Abbotsbury made no reply, but took up the newspaper. The news of Lord Redman's engagement to a Roman Catholic had disturbed him more than he cared to admit, and for the moment he did not wish to discuss the subject any further, least of all with his wife.

CHAPTER II

'My dear Lady Gwendolen, let me assure you that I am making absolutely no sacrifice in accepting the conditions imposed by your Church with regard to my marriage with Hilda. I quite understand that many men—most men, perhaps, in my position—would feel differently upon the subject. To me it is a matter of complete unconcern.'

The speaker was Lord Redman, and the three people who listened to his words tried to look shocked.

'You are at least candid in your opinions, Lord Redman,' said one of the three, an elderly man with iron-gray hair, who might have passed for a retired cavalry officer had it not been for his priestly attire.

He spoke in a harsh and curiously abrupt voice, and his keen, dark eyes looked searchingly at Lord Redman as he made the remark.

The latter returned his gaze tranquilly, almost indifferently.

'Do you think so, Mr. Galsworthy?' he replied. 'I am afraid that you are wrong there. I have no opinions, as you would call them, or prejudices, as I should call them, on matters concerning the religious belief of others.'

'But you have your personal opinions—or prejudices?'

'Possibly; but they are purely negative.'

'That is a very unhappy state of mind to be in,' said the priest gravely.

'Is it?'

Father Galsworthy looked disconcerted for a moment, and then he laughed.

'I am afraid that you are the most dangerous kind of Protestant,' he replied.

'Because I do not protest?'

'Precisely.'

At this moment Lady Gwendolen Cawarden's mother, Lady Merton, interposed.

Lady Merton bore the traces of considerable beauty, and looked many years younger than her age. She had joined the Roman Church late in life, and had acquired for herself an almost unique position among her co-religionists in England. The number of converts she had brought into the Church, and through the Church into Catholic society, was very large, for experience taught her that if crowns were eagerly sought after in the next state of life, coronets were not less so in this. So Lady Merton, girded with piety and her peerage, had been a more than usually successful proselytizer, and considered that she had been the means of launching many of her fellow-creatures into the good society of both this world and the world to come. Of all her children, the youngest, Lady Gwendolen Cawarden, was the only one who followed their mother to Rome. The others had been more or less grown up when Lady Merton became a convert to Catholicism and had declined to be convinced by her arguments.

'I am sure,' said Lady Merton, looking at her daughter, 'that dear Hilda's example will cause her husband's thoughts to turn towards the Church. I

do not agree with Father Galsworthy. An unprejudiced mind like Lord Redman's is far more likely to receive the truth than one which has to rid itself of Protestant falsehood concerning our holy religion. I speak from personal experience, you know,' she added, with a little sigh, turning to her future grandson-in-law; 'for I had many mental struggles to pass through before grace to see the light was vouchsafed to me.'

Lady Merton's voice was soft and purring, and she prided herself upon being able to throw the most persuasive tones into it when necessary. Lord Redman listened politely, but he made no reply, and Lady Gwendolen, who had maintained a discreet silence during the conversation, looked at her spiritual adviser, Father Galsworthy, as though expecting him to conclude the matter under discussion.

The latter nodded his head appreciatively as Lady Merton finished speaking.

'No doubt Lady Merton is perfectly right,' he remarked. 'As she says, she has an experience which is denied to those who, like myself, have been born within the fold of the Church. It is an experience, moreover, of which, as we all know, she has made the best use.'

If she had been a cat Lady Merton would have rubbed herself against the ecclesiastical legs; as it was, she only purred a modest disclaimer.

'I do not think,' continued Father Galsworthy, 'that there is any more to be said. Lord Redman appears to be fully aware of the conditions which the Church imposes in the case of what is termed a mixed marriage. No other religious ceremony save that of the Roman

Church is permissible; and Lord Redman must give his solemn undertaking that any children born of his marriage shall be brought up in the Holy Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman religion. I understand that he is prepared to accept these conditions unreservedly, and also to promise that Miss Cawarden, after she has become his wife, shall have full liberty to exercise and practise her religion as her conscience and the precepts of the Church shall demand.'

Lord Redman bowed.

'I have already said,' he replied, 'that these matters are comparatively unimportant to me. I respect all religions, and that of my wife would have the first claim to my respect. I hope, Mr. Galsworthy, that I have made my meaning clear?'

The Oratorian looked at him.

'Yes,' he said in his abrupt manner, 'I think you have. But you must pardon me if I say that I would rather you did not shelter yourself behind indifference.'

'It is a very good shield,' said Lord Redman, with a slight smile.

'I admit it—so long as you feel you need a shield. It is the hardest of all to penetrate. But supposing the day should come, after you had been married some time, when you felt that you no longer needed such a shield—when your indifference broke down, so to speak——'

'Yes?' said Lord Redman interrogatively.

'The promises which appear to you to be so easy to give in your present frame of mind might not be so easy to fulfil,' continued Father Galsworthy.

Lady Merton intervened once more.

'Dear Father Galsworthy,' she said gently, 'I do

not wish to interfere with your objections, but do you not think that we are taking too much upon ourselves in thus striving to look into the future? Lord Redman's scepticism may vanish—that is perfectly true. But may it not be that it shall vanish in answer to our prayers for his enlightenment? St. Joseph——'

'Was a carpenter,' interposed Lord Redman, smiling. 'I do not think we need bring him into the question,' he added, holding out his hand to Lady Gwendolen. 'Mr. Galsworthy will, no doubt, report to the proper quarters that I am prepared unreservedly to accept the conditions imposed by the Church. I only ask for myself the same liberty of conscience which I engage to give to my future wife. To-morrow morning, then, I will come for Hilda,' he added, shaking hands with the remainder of the little party assembled in the drawing-room of the Cawardens' house in Eaton Square; 'we are going to do some shopping together.'

'And you will come back to luncheon?' said Lady Gwendolen.

'Thanks, yes. To-morrow, then, at eleven o'clock. Will you tell Hilda?' and so saying, Lord Redman left the room.

Father Galsworthy took his departure a few minutes afterwards, leaving Lady Gwendolen and her mother alone together.

'A very holy man, Gwen dear,' said Lady Merton when the drawing-room door had closed upon the priest, 'but not a man of the world.'

'Who—Father Galsworthy?'

'Certainly. I was not alluding to Redman. I was on thorns lest he should spoil the whole thing. Anybody could have seen that Redman was getting very

impatient; he wouldn't have taken me up about St. Joseph if he wasn't.'

'He only said that St. Joseph was a carpenter,' observed Lady Gwendolen.

'Very true,' replied Lady Merton—'so he was; but it is not good taste to allude to the fact. That young man can say some very satirical things sometimes,' she added. 'I do hope poor dear Hilda will be happy with him.'

'You should have thought of that before, mamma,' remarked her daughter. 'The marriage has been more of your making than of mine. I confess that I am full of uneasiness at the thought of Hilda marrying a Protestant.'

Lady Merton gave her a little sidelong glance.

'They are very fond of one another,' she said. 'For all we know, Hilda may be the chosen instrument to bring Redman into the Church. It would have been most rash to place any obstacles in the way of the marriage. Think, Gwen, what an acquisition Redman would be to the Faith in England! A peer, and rich—a man, too, who has generally been considered almost an agnostic—why, his conversion would be followed by hundreds of others in the country. And then the joy it would be to us all to think that Hilda had been the means of saving his soul!' concluded Lady Merton, drawing the beads of a little ebony and gold rosary, which hung at her waist, through her hands as she spoke. 'Oh no, my dear Gwen,' she continued, 'I do not think you need be uneasy. If Redman had pronounced Protestant convictions, I quite grant you that it might be different; but he hasn't. His mind is virgin soil, my dear—virgin soil,' repeated Lady

Merton, who, as an authoress of pious works, dearly loved a simile.

'I am not thinking of his mind,' returned Lady Gwendolen Cawarden; 'I am thinking of Hilda's. She is so young and inexperienced, and has never been brought into contact even with Protestants, let alone agnostics.'

'But she knows that Redman doesn't believe in anything!' said Lady Merton.

'She knows it from me and from Father Galsworthy.'

'Not from Redman?'

'I asked her if he ever talked upon those subjects to her. It appears that, after he had asked her to marry him, he once told her he had no faith himself, but that he should never say or do anything to interfere with hers.'

'So he told me,' observed Lady Merton. 'I thought it very sensible of him.'

'Mamma!'

'Certainly, Gwen. If Hilda is to marry a heretic, she may as well marry an out and out one. There is nothing so unsatisfactory as a Protestant!'

'She needn't have married a heretic at all,' objected Lady Gwendolen.

'No; she might have married one of our Catholic young men. They are excellent creatures—from the next world's point of view; and we are all delighted when our friends' daughters marry them.'

'I married one.'

'My dear, you married an exception. Poor dear Roger was a *parti* as well as a Catholic. We cannot live on "Hail Marys," unfortunately. That is what priests like Father Galsworthy do not understand.

Hilda is an extremely lucky person. She is marrying a rich man, with a fine place, an old name, and no objections. I really can't imagine what you and Father Galsworthy are afraid of.'

Lady Gwendolen was silent. She had always been a little frightened at her mother, and her own marriage had not been what she herself would have chosen. Before she married Roger Cawarden she had been very much in love with a man who, as Lady Merton put it, could never have supplied her with anything more substantial than 'Hail Marys.' Then Mr. Cawarden had come forward, and Lady Merton had taken the matter into her own hands. It had all turned out very well, and in after life, when left a widow with a good jointure, Lady Gwendolen was obliged to confess that her mother had acted in a very sensible manner.

Lady Gwendolen, however, was a sincerely earnest Catholic, and the thought that her daughter was about to make a mixed marriage was a matter which caused her genuine uneasiness.

She felt the force of Father Galsworthy's objection, which her mother had feared might have the effect of making Lord Redman think that too many concessions were going to be demanded of him; and, indeed, when she reminded Lady Merton that the engagement had been largely due to the latter, Lady Gwendolen had only spoken the truth.

Lady Merton, as a matter of fact, had done all in her power to bring about an alliance between her granddaughter and Lord Redman, and it was at her house in the country that the two had first met.

It had not been an easy marriage to arrange, not-

withstanding that Hilda Cawarden and Lord Redman had fallen very satisfactorily in love with each other, and that Lord Redman was honestly indifferent as to what Hilda's creed might be. Lady Gwendolen would not hear of her daughter marrying a Protestant. No Cawarden of Cawarden had ever done such a thing. At one time it had looked very much as if the marriage was an impossibility, and had it not been that the young couple were sincerely attached to each other, the influence brought to bear upon Miss Cawarden would probably have been strong enough to cause a rupture between them. It was at this juncture that Lady Merton's pious reputation in the Catholic world enabled her to overcome the opposition to a marriage of which her worldly instincts thoroughly approved; and Lord Redman, considerably to his surprise, found a most energetic ally where he had expected to find a determined opponent.

To her lay and ecclesiastical friends Lady Merton described Lord Redman as a rudderless ship driven to and fro on a stormy sea. The simile was by no means a new one, and she had herself applied it indiscriminately in her writings to the Church of England, the Old Catholics, and United Italy. In this instance Hilda Cawarden was the obvious rudder by means of which Lord Redman's drifting spiritual barque was to be guided into port. It had cost her no little trouble to make her daughter see the matter in the same light; and Lady Gwendolen had said, with some directness, that she didn't care whether Lord Redman drifted into port or not.

Lady Merton had expressed herself to some of her particular friends among the higher clergy as very much shocked at this deliberate casting away of an

opportunity to save a perishing soul, and most of them agreed with her.

She had found an opponent, however, in Father Galsworthy, whom Lady Gwendolen was in the habit of consulting on spiritual matters. The Oratorian was from the first absolutely opposed to the projected marriage, and he used all his influence with Lady Gwendolen to make her oppose it also. Lady Merton, however, had found means, if not to gain his approval, at least to silence his objections. She intended that Hilda should be Lady Redman, and she was a woman who had generally succeeded in having her own way. When she became aware that Father Galsworthy's influence was encouraging Lady Gwendolen in her opposition to Hilda's engagement, she betook herself to his ecclesiastical superiors. Whether Lord Redman would have been altogether pleased at the picture which she drew of him to the latter was by no means certain. According to Lady Merton, he was a weary and dissatisfied soul, knocking at the door of the Church and only needing a little encouragement to enter in and rest. She had told Hilda the same thing so often that the girl believed her, and love added a fresh strength to her determination to be the means of opening the doors of belief to her lover. The end of it had been that Father Galsworthy received a hint, from a quarter which he dared not ignore, to allow matters to take their natural course and to do nothing either to promote or impede Miss Cawarden's marriage. He was given to understand that Lord Redman had declared his readiness to accept the terms imposed by the Church in England in the case of the marriage of a Catholic with a person beyond its pale, and that, therefore, no more was to be said.

That afternoon in Eaton Square Lord Redman had been asked by Lady Gwendolen finally to promise, in the presence of Father Galsworthy, that he would never in any way interfere with her daughter's faith; that no other religious ceremony save that of her Church should be performed at the marriage; and that all the children which might be born to them should be brought up Catholics.

Lord Redman, as he had said himself, had found no difficulty in promising each and all of these things, and two or three days afterwards appeared the paragraph in the newspapers which had so greatly exercised the minds of the Rector of Abbotsbury and his wife.

'I have always turned out right in these matters,' said Lady Merton complacently, as she saw that her daughter was not convinced. 'Redman will come into the Church in time,' she continued, 'but even if he doesn't, think what we shall have gained. Abbotsbury will be another great Catholic house in the country, and who knows how many souls may be saved in future days by its influence? It would have been a terrible responsibility to incur, Gwen, to have disallowed this marriage, and I think Father Galsworthy must be blind not to see it. But then, priests cannot be expected to understand our world, you know. May I have the carriage, dear? I am going to Benediction at Farm Street. Do you know what I have done? Now that things are happily settled I will tell you. I have written to Rome, to dear Monsignor Chester, and asked him to get permission to say Mass in the crypt of St. Peter's, and to offer it for Redman's conversion.' And Lady Merton rustled gracefully out of the room, her rosary and little gold crucifix clinking as she moved, and went to dress for her drive to Farm Street.

CHAPTER III

As Mr. Russell had foreseen, Lord and Lady Redman came to Abbotsbury early in September, when the first breath of autumn was touching the fields and the hedgerows, and the bryony berries were beginning to redden, while the roses and the honeysuckle in the cottage gardens had given place to the more gorgeous colouring of hollyhocks and gladioli, and scarlet groups of 'red-hot poker.'

Lord and Lady Redman's home-coming had been a very simple affair. Indeed, they had arrived late in the evening at Abbotsbury, and the demonstrations of welcome to the bride had been confined to the ringing cheers of a group of villagers and tenants as the carriage passed into the park gates. Lord Redman was a considerate and popular landlord, and the Abbotsbury people were glad to feel that he was bringing a wife among them, for they and theirs for many generations had been born, and lived, and died on the Redman property.

There had been, it must be confessed, a feeling almost akin to dismay when it became known that Lord Redman was marrying a Roman Catholic. Abbotsbury and Rome had not had much opportunity of studying each other, for very few of the Abbotsbury folk had ever penetrated beyond the high stone wall surrounding the

domain of the Dominican monastery, which, once the residence of an old Staffordshire family, had been bought by the Order some ten years previously. Occasionally some of them would go out of curiosity to a service in the monastery church on a Sunday afternoon in summer, but they returned home more perplexed than impressed by what they had seen and heard there.

If the monastic establishment at Abbotsbridge, as the spot was called where the Dominican Fathers had settled themselves, was something of a mystery to the inhabitants of the neighbouring village of Abbotsbury, at least the latter bore no ill-feeling towards its inmates. In whatever way the monks might occupy themselves, they did not interfere with the affairs of others. The monastery gave a certain amount of employment, agricultural and otherwise, to the labourers and tradespeople of the district, and paid punctually and liberally. In other ways, save for hearing the bells of the church, the Abbotsbury people knew very little about them.

It was a different thing, however, to feel that the mistress of Abbotsbury was a Roman Catholic, and people began to wonder whether Lord Redman's wife would be like the black-and-white-robed monks by the river-side, and live in a mysterious seclusion. Mr. Russell and his wife had received many interrogations on the subject, but, though they looked forward to the bride's advent with no little uneasiness and dislike, they had been too loyal to Lord Redman to say anything which could prejudice his dependents against the woman he had married. As Mr. Russell said, the thing was done, and it was no use making matters more unpleasant than they need be. All that could be hoped was that

Lady Redman was not a bigot, and would not try to proselytize in Abbotsbury, or undermine the legitimate influence of the Rectory and the parish church.

The morning after the arrival of the Redmans Mr. Russell was writing letters in his study, and his wife was sitting with him, when a servant announced that his lordship and Lady Redman were in the drawing-room.

The Russells looked at each other.

'That is very nice of him, bringing her to see us at once,' said the Rector.

'James,' said Mrs. Russell nervously, 'I wonder what she will be like. I'm sure I shan't know what to talk to her about.'

'Never mind; let us go in and get it over;' and they went to the drawing-room together.

'How are you, Mary?' said Lord Redman, coming forward to meet them. 'We have paid you an early visit; but I wanted you and Russell to be the first people at Abbotsbury to know my wife, your new cousin. Hilda, I don't think I need introduce you formally?'

Lady Redman shook hands with them.

'No, indeed!' she said, smiling. 'I hope we haven't disturbed you by coming at this informal hour,' she added; 'but, you see, we were determined that our first visit should be to the Rectory. What a delightful place, and what a garden! How happy you must be here!'

Lady Redman was so perfectly natural and at her ease, that Mrs. Russell's nervousness vanished at once.

'We have grown very fond of it,' she answered; and then she looked at her cousin's wife, and found that she

was quite a different person in appearance and manners from all that she had imagined she would be.

Hilda Redman seemed to be the personification of careless youth and happiness. Mrs. Russell saw a pretty, smiling face looking at her from under the broad brim of a Gainsborough hat, and surrounded by a wealth of curling auburn hair; a tall, well-modelled figure, which with years would become stately; a general, indefinable look of high-breeding and the natural simplicity which nearly always accompanies it.

'You are pleased with your first impressions of Abbotsbury, I hope, Lady Redman?' said the Rector.

'More than pleased—enchanted,' replied Hilda. 'It is a beautiful old place. Walter is going to take me everywhere. We are going to visit every house and cottage on the property. I shan't feel at home until I have made acquaintance with all his people. Do you think they will be kind to me?' she added half appealingly.

'Kind to you!' echoed Mr. Russell. 'I am sure you will be kind to them, which is far more to the purpose.'

'The kindness must be mutual to be satisfactory,' said Lady Redman, with a little laugh. 'I don't mean soup and jellies on one side, and curtsies and thanks on the other. I want to know the people and to make them feel that they know me,' she added, with a little emphasis.

'That will not be difficult,' said the Rector. 'Our Abbotsbury folk are a little behind the times, perhaps, but they are very approachable, especially for anybody who bears the name of Redman. You will find an almost feudal feeling remaining about here for your

husband's family. There are farmers and labourers whose families have been on the estate for centuries.'

'Can we look into the church, Russell?' asked Lord Redman. 'Hilda would like to see it.'

Mr. Russell looked a little surprised.

'Of course!' he replied. 'Abbotsbury Church is always open. Mary and I will show Lady Redman the garden on our way there.'

They went out through the drawing-room window on to the terrace, and Hilda lingered, admiring the old-fashioned garden, with its sweet-scented flowers and herbaceous borders, and the view over the Trent Valley to the high ground of Cannock Chase.

'There,' said the Rector, pointing to the monastery buildings in the distance, 'is Abbotsbridge. It will be your nearest church, Lady Redman—only a mile and a half from here.'

'Within the three-mile limit, Hilda,' said her husband, laughing; 'so you can't get out of going.'

'The three-mile limit?' asked Mrs. Russell vaguely. 'What do you mean, Walter?'

'If there is a church within three miles of her, Hilda is obliged to go there on Sundays and holy days,' explained Lord Redman.

Mrs. Russell felt inclined to remark that there was a church within a hundred yards of Abbotsbury, but, catching her husband's eye, she refrained.

Abbotsbury Church was a very ancient building, and among the arches of the nave were two or three remaining of Saxon architecture, which the Rector pointed out to Hilda with pardonable pride. The chancel, however, was the most interesting part of the edifice. As in several churches in Staffordshire, it was considerably

below the level of the nave, so that the congregation looked down upon the altar. The tombs of dead and gone Redmans surrounded it on all sides. Recumbent effigies of knightly Crusaders in armour, with their dames by their sides, lay gazing up to the vaulted roof, their feet crossed on their couchant hound, and their marble hands, yellow with time, joined in an attitude of prayer. Here and there, above one of the warriors, hung a rusty helmet or dinted casque, or a pair of mailed gauntlets, to which the leather still hung in mouldering strips. The walls were covered with brasses and memorials of the past bearers of the name. Soldiers, priests, courtiers, statesmen — there were records of all, above and beneath; for the chancel was in reality the mortuary chapel of the Redmans, whose family vaults lay beneath its pavement, and it was the property, not of the Church, but of the head of the ancient house which for nearly a thousand years had dwelt at Abbotsbury.

Hilda looked at her husband as he stood by the marble effigy of one of the earliest of his ancestors, also a Walter Redman, which lay at the right-hand side of the altar. The rich tracery of the reredos still remained, but the niches which had held the figures of the saints were empty. In the centre space, which the crucifix had once filled, and sometimes the monstrance containing the Host, stood brass vases of autumnal flowers. On the altar itself a plain brass cross occupied the place where once the ciborium had been, flanked by two candlesticks. Except for the cross, it more resembled, to Hilda's mind, a dressing-table or a side-board than an altar. As she looked at Lord Redman, the living representative of the dead all around him, she could

not but feel that the latter were worthily replaced by their descendant so far as character and personal appearance were concerned. Nobody could look at Walter Redman and take him for other than a high-bred gentleman.

Tall, with a slight but strong figure, he had the open brow and steady, straightforward expression of countenance that was remarkable in the faces of many of the family portraits at Abbotsbury. It was not a hard face, but there was that about the lines of the mouth and chin which spoke of a certain degree of quiet determination of character. The living Walter Redman looked very handsome as he leaned carelessly against the tomb of the dead one—the goodly heir of a goodly English race. As Hilda watched him, a sudden sense of the incongruity of the situation came to her. What had he, her husband, in common with those old Redmans who had been laid to rest with all the stately ritual of the Faith he denied?

She looked beyond him to the stripped and barren altar, and the emptiness of it all smote her. How could Walter stand there so calmly and indifferently, she wondered, and not realize how separated he was from all that those lying at his feet had held most sacred? She looked at the Russells. The Rector was adjusting the blue ribbons of the markers in the large Bible on the lectern, and his wife was pushing refractory dahlias into the brass vases on the altar.

Hilda wished that she and her husband had been alone together in the church. She longed to say to him something of what was passing in her mind—to ask him how he could stand there among his dead and be untouched by the Faith that had been theirs. Here,

around and beneath them, generation after generation had laid themselves down in peace and a sure and certain hope; but the old Faith had changed, and he, Walter Redman, was the result of the change—a man with no hopes and no fears, no trust in the future, no belief in the present.

Never since the day of her marriage had Hilda felt so great a longing to speak. It would be a relief, she thought, if she could only ask Walter the simple question, 'Why?' But the compact made at their marriage rose up like a barrier between them. Her husband had hitherto scrupulously adhered to his promise never to interfere with her religious opinions, and Hilda always remembered that he had stipulated for a similar non-interference on her part with his views on such subjects. However much, therefore, she might wish to break down this barrier, she felt that she could not fail in maintaining her part of the compact made at their engagement. The latter had, as a matter of fact, been not so much of her making as of Lady Merton's. There had been a time when Lord Redman became impatient of the objections to the marriage which Lady Gwendolen, inspired by her own fears and Father Galsworthy's counsels, had perpetually brought forward. He was quite prepared to allow to his wife the full liberty of her conscience, but he had no intention of resigning the liberty of his own. Lady Merton foresaw the danger of a rupture of any further negotiations on Lord Redman's part. It was she who had suggested this compact to Walter, and had advised her grand-daughter to agree to it. Hilda would have agreed to anything which did not entail the loss of her lover. Her religious convictions

were the result rather of heredity and education than of reason and spiritual discernment. With how many of us are they not ?

When Lady Merton found a way out of the difficulty acceptable alike to Walter Redman and to Hilda, she probably did not believe that the latter would consider herself as bound in honour to adhere to her part of the contract. Indeed, in the course of the conversations which they had had together on the subject, she had tried to make Hilda understand that the measure was one to be undertaken for the protection of her own faith and spiritual welfare, and as a security that the commencement of her married life should be serene, and free from any of those petty differences which divergence of religious opinions might produce. Afterwards, she had told the girl, it might be her duty to do all in her power to overcome her husband's scepticism and bring him into the Church.

Lady Gwendolen, accustomed all her life to submit her own more simple judgment to the guidance of Lady Merton's superior worldly experience and spiritual tact, talked to her daughter in the same sense when once she had brought herself to accept Lady Merton's argument, that the Almighty had arranged that Hilda and Lord Redman should marry each other with the double object in view of saving the latter's soul and of benefiting the position of His Church.

Hilda had listened and acquiesced. She had been so supremely happy during the few weeks which had elapsed since her marriage, that the thought of any difference of belief existing between Walter Redman and herself had scarcely ever occurred to her, and had certainly never troubled her. They had spent their

honeymoon in the North of Scotland, and it was only when the time drew near for their arrival at Abbotsbury that Hilda had sometimes felt nervous as to how she might be received in her husband's place, and whether she should be looked upon with coldness and distrust as a Roman Catholic, who was probably trying to convert him.

She had confided her fears to Walter, and he had laughed at her.

'You may be sure,' he had said to her, 'that acquaintance with people who look coldly on others on account of their beliefs or disbeliefs is not worth cultivating,' and with this remark he had dropped the subject.

That very morning, while they were wandering through the rooms at Abbotsbury, Lord Redman had taken his wife into what had once been the old chapel, but which for many long years had been dismantled and used as a kind of lumber-room.

'We used to be turned in here to play on wet days when we were children,' he said, with a smile. And then he had added: 'I dare say you would like to have it restored to its old use. It could very easily be done, if you wish it.'

Hilda was roused from her reflections by her husband's voice.

'What are you thinking about?' he asked. 'You look very serious.'

Hilda smiled.

'All sorts of things, Walter,' she replied. 'I am glad you brought me here,' she added softly.

'I hope you will often come, Lady Redman,' said the Rector; 'you will always find the church open.'

'We have three services on Sundays, and Matins

and Evensong on Wednesdays and Fridays,' remarked Mrs. Russell from the altar.

Lord Redman intervened a little hastily.

'Come, Hilda,' he said; 'I think we must be going back to the house. You have been introduced to the dead, and there are plenty of the living who are anxious to see you.'

'Won't you and Mary come and dine with us to-night?' he added, turning to Mr. Russell.

'Shan't we be *de trop?*' asked the Rector.

Lady Redman laughed.

'Oh no,' she replied; 'Walter and I have dined alone for nearly six weeks. I believe he is simply longing for a change of company.'

'You will be doing Hilda a kindness, you see,' remarked Lord Redman.

The Russells parted with them in the churchyard, and walked slowly back to the Rectory together.

'Mary,' said the Rector solemnly, 'she is charming.'

'Yes; but, oh dear! that makes it all the worse.'

'Makes what all the worse?'

'Why, her being a Romanist, of course!'

Mr. Russell frowned a little.

'It is a sad misfortune,' he said, sighing; 'but at any rate a pleasant Romanist is better than a disagreeable one, and they can be very disagreeable sometimes; the women especially, if they are perverts.'

Mr. Russell had a vivid recollection of days passed in a hotel at Rome much frequented by English-women of middle age and fervent piety, who talked at him amongst each other during meals in the hopes of making him realize the falsity of the Anglican position.

'She is evidently anxious to be friendly,' he con-

tinued, 'and Redman and she appear to be very happy. I liked what she said about wishing to know all the people, and not to be merely a sort of Lady Bountiful to them.'

'Yes, I suppose so,' replied his wife dubiously, 'so long as she doesn't try to proselytize among them. I must say, James, she is quite a different sort of person from what I had pictured her, and I don't wonder that Walter fell in love with her. We must wait and see, however, what line she will take, and whether she will fill the house with her Roman Catholic friends and relations and surround Walter with priests. There will be many influences at work upon her, you may be sure, for Walter would be a great catch for her Church.'

The Rector stepped across a bed of onions, and released a blackbird from the meshes of a net stretched across a plum-tree on the red-brick wall of the garden.

'Heaven knows I don't want Redman to become a Roman Catholic,' he said when he had completed the operation, 'but an element of belief introduced into his life would not be a bad thing for him. I confess that I shall be curious to see how things go at the Hall. Her bringing up must have been so utterly different, and I can't think how she will get on among the set that Redman likes to have about him. Luckily for both of them, the marriage is evidently one of affection. If it were not so, I should be afraid there might be disagreeables in the future, when they have to settle down to their everyday life.'

CHAPTER IV

THE autumn days faded gently and imperceptibly into winter. Except for an occasional three days' visit, Lord and Lady Redman had remained at Abbotsbury. After the first week or so they had seldom been alone, for there had been a succession of guests coming and going on their way south from Scotland to the various country-houses in the Midlands. Hilda had experienced none of the petty annoyances which in the earlier days of her married life she had feared she might encounter owing to her being a Catholic. Perhaps her personal beauty and charm of manner disarmed those of her husband's county neighbours who might have been inclined to resent his marriage with her on the score of her faith. A certain amount of disapproval had not unnaturally been expressed in Staffordshire at the marriage, for Abbotsbury had been looked upon from time immemorial as an institution in the county, and many of the old friends and connections of the Redman family were genuinely grieved at the thought that the old place and name must, in all probability, pass in the future to Catholic owners.

The late Lord Redman and his predecessors before him had entertained at Abbotsbury on a princely scale. In their reign the place had been a centre of the

intimate county society of those times, when people did not hurry madly from one country-house to another through the length and breadth of the kingdom, staying three days here and three days there, and spending half of their existence and much of their substance on the railway. Abbotsbury had been a house where the worthies of all the country between the Peak and the Wrekin met, and three counties had been proud of its hospitality and venerable traditions.

There were those yet alive who remembered how Christmas had been kept at Abbotsbury in the days of the grandfather of the present owner, and could see the stately old peer seated at the head of the long table in the Barons' Hall, a room rich with the associations of the Redmans and of England itself. The light of the wax-candles fell upon the old stained-glass windows emblazoned with the various coats of arms and quarterings of the house since the twelfth century. Over the great fireplace, carved in bas-relief, was a representation of the signing of Magna Charta, and ancient tapestries, depicting famous episodes of war and statecraft in which the race had taken part, hung from the walls. The old folk would tell how, at the conclusion of dinner, the head forester of Redman's Cross would enter the hall, followed by his subordinates clad in their uniforms of green and gold, each leading a leash of the famous blood-hounds which had been bred in the kennels at Redman's Cross for centuries. They would tell how the hounds, so formidable in appearance, so gentle in reality, would be led round the dining-table and up to the old lord, who would caress them and give to each his portion of Christmas fare.

And then the mummers would come in, with their

horned masks and their hobby-horses, and sing the old songs that were sung, it may be, to Robin Hood and Maid Marion, and the simple, quaint Christmas carols of past days. Christmas-tide over, they would hang up their mummers' toggery in Abbotsbury Church, not to be taken down till the Festival of the Holy Child should come round again; and chance visitors to the church would ask what the presence of the grotesque garments and horned masks in the sacred building might mean, and would wonder at having stumbled upon a survival of medieval customs in this remote portion of the county which contains the Potteries and the Black Country within its boundaries.

If the feeling of regret remained among Lord Redman's friends and neighbours that Abbotsbury should eventually pass into Catholic hands, the new Lady Redman succeeded in winning the goodwill of all who came into contact with her. Her simple, natural manner, the same to rich and poor, quickly overcame any prejudices which might have been harboured against her personally. People said that, after all, Lord Redman was very lucky, and began to reflect that if he did not mind his wife being a Roman Catholic, and his children, if he had any, being brought up in another religion to that of his forefathers, there was no particular reason why anybody else should do so. This liberal view of the situation was, to be sure, confined to the more important of the Redmans' country neighbours, and to their own tenants and cottagers. That portion of the county society which took its views from the local clergy and the parish magazines shook its head ominously over the future of Abbotsbury, and sniffed the air to catch the first breath of proselytism.

In the more immediate neighbourhood of Abbotsbury Mrs. Russell had been the means of tranquillizing the minds of many who had expected nothing less than an immediate invasion of secret emissaries of Rome to follow the appearance of a Catholic mistress of the Hall, as the great house was called for miles round it.

The Rector had been astonished, knowing his wife's prejudices against what she termed Romanism, at the friendliness which she had developed in the course of a few weeks for Lady Redman.

Mary Russell seemed to have quite overcome her suspicions that her cousin's wife would interfere in her work among the cottagers and poor people in the parish. She would often allude to the fact of Hilda being a Romanist as deplorable, but, as the weeks went by, even these objections became less frequent on her part, and the Rector, who had always feared that the two would dislike each other, and that his position would thereby become somewhat difficult, watched the friendship growing up between them with considerable satisfaction. It would have been very unpleasant had the Hall and the Rectory at Abbotsbury not been upon friendly terms, and Mary Russell's connection with Lord Redman would have made such a state of things doubly disagreeable for all parties.

The Rector's wife was almost as much surprised as the Rector himself, not only to find that she was rapidly becoming intimate with Lady Redman, but that the latter interested her almost in spite of herself and of her foregone conclusions concerning Roman Catholics in general.

She had made up her mind that Hilda would be aggressive, and had expected to be kept at a distance

as the wife of the minister of a religion which was heretical in Lady Redman's eyes. Instead of this, she had found herself treated from the first as a relation and friend, and in her almost daily intercourse with Hilda she was obliged to confess to herself that whenever their conversation happened to touch in the remotest degree upon religious matters, it was invariably she herself who gave that particular turn to it. Indeed, had it not been for the absence of Lady Redman from the church services, and the occasional presence of Lord Redman sitting alone in the family seat in the chancel on Sunday mornings, Mary Russell would scarcely have remembered that Hilda was not one of themselves in matters of faith.

When he was at Abbotsbury, Walter Redman made a point of occasionally appearing at the parish church He did not do so, like a well-known great lady London of the middle of the century, in order to 'do the civil thing by the Almighty,' but in order to support an institution which he considered to be of use to society generally. It was neither known nor suspected at Abbotsbury that Lord Redman was an agnostic, or, as Abbotsbury would have called it with greater directness, a heathen. In Walter Redman's opinion the majority of mankind required some form or another of dogmatic belief, while a minority of it did not; but he was unable to admit that the minority had any right to attempt to interfere with that which experience had taught the majority was to the latter's advantage to believe in.

He himself had been brought up in all the formal traditions of a Protestantism into which Puseyism had never penetrated. The Honourable and Reverend

Richard, his uncle, would have been extremely annoyed had his High Church principles been called into question; but he would also have been considerably perplexed had he been defined as an Anglican priest. Regularly as a boy, on Sunday mornings, Walter had sat from eleven o'clock until a quarter to one in the oak stalls of the chancel in Abbotsbury Church, and wondered how Sir Walter de Redman could have squeezed himself into the armour which hung on the opposite wall. He found himself at thirty wondering the same thing, especially during the Psalms, or while Mr. Russell was preaching. Every morning at nine o'clock his father had been in the habit of reading family prayers in the presence of his household, in measured, exhortatory tones, as though giving the Almighty His orders for the day.

It was not until he was a young fellow of twenty that Walter had realized with some surprise that such things were not necessary to existence, and he was some years older before it became apparent to him that he had no positive belief at all. Walter Redman had always been of a thoughtful disposition. Life, in all its manifold representations, had ever possessed for him an extreme fascination. This fascination had not stopped short at the point of deriving as much enjoyment out of it as possible, as was the case with the great majority of men of his age and class. The circumstances of his boyhood had doubtless contributed in no slight degree to the formation of a somewhat serious and critical turn of mind.

He had been, to begin with, an only surviving son. Two of his brothers had died in infancy, and his life became, therefore, doubly precious to his parents. His

father had given way to the mother's desire to keep her boy at home until he should be of an age to go to a public school; and when that age arrived, Walter had been sent, like all his family before him, to Eton, Lord Redman being very strongly of the opinion that only the training of a public school could properly fit a lad to take up his position in the world as a man in after-life.

The quiet years spent with a private tutor at Abbotsbury had not been without their effect upon the boy. For good or ill, there is no such teacher as solitude for youth, and until he was fourteen years old Walter Redman had necessarily had his fair share of it. During the long summer months, when Abbotsbury was empty and his father and mother were up in London, he had no companions but his pony and his dog when the hours for work with the tutor were over. Solitary rambles through the woods, or afternoons spent on the banks of the trout-stream with his fishing-rod, had been his chief recreations, and with these had come a great love for the life of the woodland and water, and a feeling of friendship and sympathy with Nature generally. In those years Walter Redman had unconsciously made intimate acquaintance with those simple beauties of life which were to help him to grapple with its problems later on.

After four years or so at Eton, he had gone to Oxford, Lord Redman's idea having been that his son should go into Parliament. At the University Walter had speedily found the path which his temperament and the habits of observation contracted in earlier years inclined him to follow. He began to interest himself in natural science and in the social questions of the day, and his pursuit of these studies soon brought

him into contact with the more serious portion of college life. Men in this set far older than the future Lord Redman recognised in him a personality which was singularly attractive to them, and they admitted him into their circle with more readiness than they would have shown in the case of the majority of undergraduates. With all his interest in the more serious problems of existence, there was nothing of the prig about Walter Redman. It very soon became known that he was not one of those young men who affected mental superiority in order to conceal moral and physical deficiencies.

Lord Redman's unexpected death, which took place when Walter had been at Oxford about four years, put an end to all schemes of a Parliamentary career for the latter, and for a year or two after his succession to the title he continued his University life, at the conclusion of which, having taken an unusually brilliant degree, he had devoted much of his time to travelling. The world of society in London had, consequently, known little or nothing of the young Lord Redman, and he had been looked upon by mothers with marriageable daughters as completely beyond their reach. Lady Merton, however, had met him at Rome, where he had spent some weeks on his way back from an expedition in Asia Minor. Walter had been introduced to her by a mutual acquaintance as a Free-thinker, and Lady Merton, who knew all about him as soon as she heard his name, while duly deploring the fact, began to wonder whether his wandering thoughts might not eventually be turned in the direction of her granddaughter, Hilda Cawarden, who was to come out the following season in London.

Lady Merton was very civil to young Lord Redman in Rome. She asked him to her luncheon-parties in the Via Gregoriana, where she hired an ill-furnished and dreary apartment at the usual exorbitant rent demanded in the English quarter of the city, and entertained Cardinals, Monsignori, the black world generally, and a sprinkling of possible converts whose interest in Catholicism might judiciously be increased by finding themselves seated between an Archbishop in picturesque clothes and a Roman princess. Walter Redman quietly studied both his hostess and her *entourage*, as he studied most people. Lady Merton amused him. She was so obviously a professional in her Catholicism, and her capacity for assimilating the miraculous seemed to him to be second only to her powers of invention. The priests did not amuse him. Their countenances as a rule inspired him with distrust, and sometimes with a stronger feeling, while their conversation gave him the impression of men who were laughing in their sleeves at the things in which they professed to believe. The Roman princesses as a rule simply bored him.

Lady Merton, however, had no intention of losing sight of so eligible a young man as Lord Redman, and she had pressed him to come to Ware the following autumn for one of her shooting parties, for which she had taken good care that Miss Cawarden should be staying with her.

Hilda had been married but a very short time before she found out that the state of perplexity and dissatisfaction in which Lady Merton had depicted her husband as labouring existed only in her grandmother's imagination. She could not but see that Walter was entirely happy, and that he was very far indeed from evincing the

interest in his wife's religion which she had been so repeatedly assured would show itself directly after their marriage. The absence of it did not disturb her very seriously. A young girl, married to the man she loved, and who she knew returned her love, it was not to be wondered at if she had no place for other thoughts in her mind than of her husband's and her own happiness. She drove over to Abbotsbridge to Mass on Sunday mornings, and when she got there it seemed easier to thank God for all that had been given to Walter and to herself than to ask for anything more. It was quite in vain that Lady Merton urged her in her letters to address herself to the intervention of St. Joseph as a means of obtaining her husband's speedy conversion. Hilda felt that the interference of St. Joseph, or of any other saint, would not be acceptable just then. She did not believe that Walter and she would be either more or less happy if he were a Catholic, and she was not at all sure that St. Joseph, with the best intentions, might not introduce discordant elements into their lives. On the whole, therefore, it seemed to be safer not to make any effort to interest him in the matter for the present, and she felt almost uneasy at the thought of the possible effects which the attempts of her relations to do so might produce.

Curiously enough, the only person at Abbotsbury with whom Hilda was able to talk of her religion was Mary Russell. The subject seemed to have a strange fascination for Mrs. Russell, and as she became more intimate with her cousin's wife, she would ask her for information on many points of Catholic doctrine, although she was scarcely able to conceal her disapproval when these were explained to her by Lady

Redman. The Roman Church, indeed, exercised the attraction of the candle to the moth for the wife of the Rector of Abbotsbury, but, notwithstanding her strong prejudices against Romanists, as she invariably termed its members, she had never before been brought into contact with one of them, except in the most formal and transitory manner. She had not, therefore, been able to recover her astonishment, during the first weeks of her acquaintance with Hilda, at finding the latter to be like other people, and, as she daily had occasion to think, nicer than the majority. She had expected to find a supercilious young woman who would look upon her as an ignorant heretic, to be pitied, perhaps, but also to be made to feel both her ignorance and her heresy. She had found instead a natural, unaffected girl, full of the happiness and high spirits of youth.

That this attitude had not proceeded from carelessness or indifference on Lady Redman's part Mary Russell had very quickly realized. She had not been able to avoid observing that while Hilda never spontaneously talked about her own religion, she often inquired very minutely into matters which were indirectly connected with the parish church.

'I shall come to you for information about the village people and the farmers,' Hilda had said to her, smiling, at an early period of their acquaintanceship. 'You see,' she had added, 'at Cawarden it was different. Almost all our people there are Catholics, so, of course, I knew just how to talk to them, and all about their wants and their grievances. But here I am afraid of being looked upon as an intruder on account of our not all going to the same church.'

This little speech had done much to allay Mary

Russell's fears, into which there had entered a certain amount of jealousy, lest Hilda should seek to undermine her influence in the parish and perhaps attempt to introduce disturbing ideas into the heads of the Abbotsbury folk. She very soon became satisfied that Lady Redman had no intention of doing anything of the kind. It was wonderful how soon Hilda made friends, as she had expressed her determination of doing, with all her husband's tenants. Even the Tomlinsons, the dissenting farmer and his wife who were the tenants of one of the most important of the Abbotsbury farms, and who were thorns in the sides of the Rector and Mary Russell, were among her most devoted admirers. The *odium theologicum* had kindled somewhat over this point at the Rectory, and Mrs. Russell had even gone so far as to remark a little irritably that, after all, it was very natural. Dissenters always made friends with each other, and Hilda, when all was said and done, was a dissenter just as much as the Tomlinsons were.

So the weeks passed, and already Christmas-time was approaching. It soon became known in the neighbourhood that Christmas that year was to be kept up at Abbotsbury according to the traditions of the place. Lord and Lady Redman had expressed their determination to revive all the kindly hospitality and picturesque usages which had been neglected while the present owner was a bachelor and absent on his travels in far-off countries. The Hall was to be filled by a large party of guests staying in the house from the day before Christmas Eve until after Twelfth Night. None, rich or poor, was to be forgotten or left out in the cold. Hilda, assisted by Mary Russell, was already

occupied in writing the invitations for a ball, to which all the hostesses of the country-houses within driving distance were asked to bring their guests on the night of the New Year, and this was to be followed two nights afterwards by a tenants' ball, to which all the farmers and their families, the tradespeople of Trentford (the little town which lay in the valley some five miles from Abbotsbury), the servants, keepers, foresters, and retainers of the estate generally were bidden, together with any of the neighbouring gentry who cared to come to it. Then there was to be a big Christmas-tree for the school-children, a dinner for the cottagers and their wives—a ten-days' round of feasting and rejoicing, in fact, in which all were to have their part according to time-honoured custom at Abbotsbury.

The house-party for these festivities was to include relations of both Hilda and her husband, and among those of Lady Redman, Lady Gwendolen Cawarden and Lady Merton were expected.

Hilda was a little anxious concerning the latter's visit to Abbotsbury. Her mother had already stayed a few days at Abbotsbury, soon after she and Walter had come there at the conclusion of their honeymoon. Lady Gwendolen, however, seeing that her daughter was evidently perfectly happy in her new surroundings, had wisely refrained from questioning her as to whether her husband showed any signs of being attracted to the Church.

Hilda knew her grandmother too well, however, not to feel sure that she would take the earliest opportunity of ascertaining whether St. Joseph had been doing what was expected of him during the months which

had elapsed since her marriage. It had been an easy matter enough to respond in a vague manner to Lady Merton's questions on the subject in her letters; but Hilda thought it more than probable that, in her zeal for the faith, she would attempt to give St. Joseph some assistance, and would endeavour herself to talk to Walter on religious topics.

Lady Redman was not at all sure what the effect of such an attempt might be. Hitherto the most perfect confidence had existed between herself and her husband. She had often been surprised at the similarity of views which they possessed on many subjects. It seemed to her to be extraordinary that their convictions regarding spiritual things should be so widely diverse, and that this should yet create so little impression upon their relations to each other in their daily life. Sometimes she experienced qualms of conscience, and wondered whether she were not allowing her love for her husband to supplant that other love which her training had taught her to believe was required by God for Himself and His Church. She knew very well what was expected of her by her family, and, indeed, by her co-religionists generally. Lady Gwendolen had been thankful, as soon as her mother had persuaded her into giving her consent to Hilda's marriage with a Protestant, to seize upon that which Lady Merton had impressed upon her was its great redeeming feature, and she had never ceased to remind her daughter that the latter had the grave responsibility of being chosen to bring about the return of an ancient family to the faith of its forefathers. Father Galsworthy had talked to her long and earnestly upon this responsibility, and upon the influence which the proper use of it on her part might bring to Catholicism

in England, while Lady Merton had solemnly told her on repeated occasions that she was an instrument in the hands of God for bringing salvation to souls yet unborn.

During her brief engagement it had seemed to Hilda that to be an instrument of any such purpose was, on the whole, an enviable position of which any Catholic girl might reasonably be proud. She had been brought up in an atmosphere of which religion was the principal component part. It had appeared to her, in the days immediately preceding her marriage, that it would be an easy thing to win her lover over to her faith. She had expected, so entirely had religion dominated the details of her life at Cawarden—the Mass in the chapel which commenced the day, the recital of the rosary which ended it, the visits to the Blessed Sacrament which the Cawardens were privileged to reserve in their family chapel—that there could be no intercommunion of ideas and sympathies from which a common bond of faith in the things unseen was absent.

When Hilda looked back upon the short weeks of her married life, it amazed her, and at times almost frightened her, to see how very quickly she had drifted into a condition of existence in which not only did these things have no part, but she did not feel their absence as she believed she ought to feel it. To be sure, she went to Mass on Sundays and days of obligation, and otherwise conformed to the observances which the Church required of her; but her life was no longer the same. The atmosphere of Cawarden and that of Abbotsbury were entirely different. It was extraordinary, she thought, that she had felt the difference so little—that Walter and she should be so

happy together that what had seemed at Cawarden to be spiritual necessities of life, at Abbotsbury should have, in a manner, ceased to be so. Hilda wondered what Father Galsworthy would say to her should she seek his counsel on the subject. Her conscience would sometimes assert itself, and tell her that this putting off of the work which her confessor and her relations had told her was appointed for her to do, in order to avoid risking any interruption in the happiness of her life with Walter, was a dereliction from duty and an act of moral cowardice.

It had been a relief sometimes to talk to Mary Russell on religious matters. The Rector's wife at least displayed an interest in her faith, although it was an antagonistic and prejudiced interest, and Hilda found this attitude of Mrs. Russell's an easier one to deal with than the absolute indifference to all forms of dogmatic belief which seemed to form an impenetrable barrier against any approach to discussion with her husband on the subject. She was always ready, therefore, to answer Mrs. Russell's questions, which, as their intimacy increased, became more frequent and more searching. To say the truth, Mary Russell displayed an ignorance of the real tenets of the Church to which she was so opposed which astonished Hilda even while it amused her. It became quite interesting to explain to her inquiring cousin how completely mistaken she was in many of her most cherished suppositions respecting the belief held by Roman Catholics.

Though Lady Redman possessed neither more nor less theological knowledge than the average girl brought up and educated in Catholic surroundings, she found that it cost her no great effort completely to demolish

more than one of Mrs. Russell's strongest positions, inasmuch as these were chiefly based on stock misrepresentations of Catholic doctrine which Mary had learned in the first instance from her governess, and in later life from controversial books of the militant school of Protestantism.

Now, however, a few hours would bring Lady Merton and various other relatives to Abbotsbury, and Hilda felt that they would certainly try to make her give some account of her stewardship of Walter as far as it had gone.

She wished she could believe that the happiness of her new life might be sufficient to justify this account in their eyes; but the letters she had received since her marriage both from her mother and from Lady Merton convinced Lady Redman that the mere fact of her husband and herself enjoying mutual happiness would not be admitted as a justification for her having placed that happiness before any other consideration.

CHAPTER V

CHRISTMAS was ushered in that year in Staffordshire by genuine Christmas weather. A heavy fall of snow had been succeeded by a hard frost. The great oaks in the park at Abbotsbury stood out majestically against the general whiteness around them, and the scarlet berries of the old holly-trees showed like little stains of blood on their snow-laden branches.

It was nearly five o'clock, and Lady Redman was awaiting the arrival of some of her guests in the gallery at Abbotsbury. The room occupied the entire length of the façade of one of the courtyards around which the house was built. The great painted windows were uncurtained, and the light from inside the gallery shone through the stained glass, casting patches of colour on the snow beneath them. Within the room all was warmth and comfort. Three large fireplaces, in which were burning great logs of wood, mingled with blocks of Cannock Chase coal, warmed it, and the smell of the burning wood mingled pleasantly with the scent of orchids, lilies of the valley, and other flowers, which were distributed about it.

Lady Redman, as she sat in a low armchair by one of the fireplaces, looked in every way a woman fitted to be the mistress of so stately a home as Abbotsbury. Apart from the beauty of her features and colouring,

and the warm tints of the auburn hair clustering upon the small, high-bred-looking head, there was a certain grace and dignity about Hilda Redman which was certainly suitable to her surroundings. She had none of the spasmodic and awkward movements of the arms and legs affected by the modern English girl. The worn expression in the eyes, and the hard lines about the mouth, which make the athletic Englishwoman of two or three and twenty of to-day look double her age were conspicuous by their absence from Hilda's face, though she could take her part in all the forms of outdoor exercise necessary for a woman to indulge in. There was a certain natural, tranquil air about Lady Redman which attracted attention quite as much as her undeniable good looks. Like the portrait of some well-bred lady of a past generation, she was as a pleasant picture upon which to rest the eye, and Abbotsbury as a frame suited her admirably.

The sound of horses' hoofs beating dully on the frozen snow in the courtyard below roused Hilda from a *rêverie* into which she had fallen as she sat opposite the fire, watching the colours of the flames as they licked the great wooden logs. With a little sigh she rose from her chair and put away the book which was lying open in her lap. There would be a perpetual arrival of guests, some coming from the north and some from the south, from five o'clock to nearly dinner-time, for there was to be a party of over twenty people in the house during the coming Christmas festivities. Lady Merton and those of the visitors who were coming from London would be the earliest to reach Abbotsbury, and Hilda had barely time to walk to the end of the gallery when the doors were thrown

open and the groom-of-the-chambers announced them.

Lady Merton was the first to enter the room, and she several times kissed her grand-daughter affectionately.

'Such a pleasure,' she murmured sweetly, 'to find my dearest Hilda in her new home!' and she cast an appreciative glance around her over Lady Redman's shoulder.

'You must all be frozen,' said Hilda, leading the way to the fire, near which some tea-tables were arranged. 'I hope you found the carriages and got away at once. Trentford Station is not a pleasant place on such an evening.'

'We were not kept a moment, Lady Redman,' said Mr. Shirley, an old college friend of Walter Redman's, who was among these first arrivals; 'and we found the foot-warmers which had been so thoughtfully provided for us in the carriages much hotter than those supplied by the railway company.'

'They will bring tea directly,' said Hilda, helping Lady Merton to disengage herself from the folds of a large fur cloak. 'By the way,' she added, smiling, 'I have taken it for granted that you all know each other.'

Mr. Shirley looked inquiringly at Lady Merton, with whom he had driven from the station.

'We made acquaintance over the foot-warmer,' said the latter graciously, 'but I do not think that we know each other's names.'

Lady Redman laughed.

'Then you shall be formally introduced,' she replied. 'Mr. Edward Shirley—my grandmother, Lady Merton.'

Lady Merton made a dignified and old-fashioned bow, and Mr. Shirley a jerky and modern one, and then he looked at his new acquaintance with some curiosity. He had often heard of her, and Lord Redman had told him that he would meet her if he came to Abbotsbury for Christmas. He had never suspected, however, that the agreeable, middle-aged lady with whom he had conversed during the four-mile drive from the station was Lady Merton. He had expected, from all that he had heard, to meet a rather formidable old woman, who would quote the writings of the early Fathers to him after a few minutes' acquaintance.

Lady Merton, on her part, gave the faintest possible start of surprise when she heard his name, and looked at her granddaughter.

'Mr. Shirley the—writer?' she said, pausing a little before the last word.

Hilda looked puzzled, and Mr. Shirley came to he assistance.

'Yes,' he replied simply, with a twinkle of amusement in his eyes.

Hilda felt a little uncomfortable. It struck her that when a hostess numbered an author among her guests she should at least be aware of the fact.

'I'm afraid you must think me very ignorant,' she said to him, with a smile, 'but Redman never told me that you wrote; so, you see, I must confess that my grandmother asked me a question which I was unable to answer.'

Mr. Shirley laughed outright this time.

'My dear Lady Redman,' he replied, 'I should have been very much surprised to find that you were acquainted with the fact. I fear that my literary

efforts would not be at all interesting to you, and Walter probably did not think it worth while to allude to so tiresome a subject.'

Lady Merton went to the tea-table and sat down.

'Where is Walter?' she asked presently.

'I have not seen him since luncheon,' replied Hilda, busying herself with pouring out tea. 'He went off directly afterwards with his retriever, saying that he should go down the river and look for wild duck. This frost has brought us a quantity of them, I believe. But he will be here very soon,' she added.

Before long more guests arrived, including Lady Gwendolen Cawarden and her son, who had come from Lancashire, in which county the Cawarden estates were situated. Then Lord Redman came in, and cordially welcomed all his relations and friends. He appeared to be particularly pleased to see Mr. Shirley. The two had been at Oxford together, and their tastes and ideas were very similar. Edward Shirley, however, had not been born to succeed to a peerage and thirty or forty thousand a year. He had been obliged to use the brains and the mind which had been given to him, and, though Walter Redman's natural gifts had been very much of the same calibre, the necessity which the other had experienced of having continually to practise his powers of analysis and criticism had caused the latter to develop themselves and win for their owner a foremost place among modern philosophical and critical writers.

Mr. Shirley was Lord Redman's senior by some years, and while Walter was travelling about the world at the conclusion of his college days, Edward Shirley was studying in Berlin and learning how to think in

Paris. The material which he had acquired from the master-minds of Germany he had learned how to assimilate under the fashioners of the intellect and the teachers of the art of consecutive thought of France. The result had been a combination of the pitiless powers of probing the depths of human thought and uncovering its humanity belonging to the former school, and the keen and concise reasoning and orderly application of the reasoning faculty when acquired which are the brilliant characteristics of the latter.

'Why did you never tell me that Mr. Shirley was a distinguished author, Walter?' said Lady Redman to her husband, smiling. 'I shall have fallen in his estimation for ever in consequence.'

Lord Redman looked a little embarrassed.

'Well, really,' he replied, after a pause, 'I did not think that you would be much the wiser if I had told you. Shirley doesn't write on subjects which would particularly interest you.'

'There, Lady Redman!' exclaimed Mr. Shirley triumphantly; 'you see that I was perfectly right. If I were a novelist or a newspaper correspondent, Redman would have told you, and I feel sure that I should have found a copy of my last book, with the leaves duly cut, lying in a prominent position on one of those tables.'

'You are only making matters worse,' said Hilda, laughing. 'You evidently think me unworthy of any deeper literature than fiction. I can't say that either you or my husband are very complimentary, Mr. Shirley.'

The latter looked round the circle at the tea-table with a little smile.

'Lady Redman is rather severe on special correspondents, is she not?' he remarked.

It was nearly time to dress for dinner before all the members of the party who were expected that evening had arrived and everybody had been shown their various rooms. A small suite, consisting of a bed and dressing room and a sitting-room, had been apportioned by Hilda for Lady Merton's use, and her mother occupied the rooms adjoining these. Lady Merton called her daughter into the sitting-room while their respective maids were completing the necessary preparations for dressing for dinner. Lady Gwendolen saw at a glance that something had occurred to upset her mother. Lady Merton was not a person who could disguise her feelings with those over whom she felt she could dominate, and she had greater confidence in her influence over her daughter than she had ever been able to feel in that which she might possess over her grand-daughter.

She closed the doors of the sitting-room, and sat down with a little exclamation of disgust.

'Gwen,' she said impressively, 'I am deeply distressed.'

'Distressed?' asked Lady Gwendolen. 'About what, mamma?'

'Distressed and astonished,' continued Lady Merton, ignoring the interruption—'distressed that Hilda should be kept in ignorance by her husband of the character of the friends whom he asks into the house; astonished that I should be invited to meet such individuals.'

Lady Gwendolen stared at her mother.

'I do not understand,' she said. 'What people do you mean?'

'What people?' returned Lady Merton. 'Why, infidel writers such as Mr. Shirley, a man who spends his life in attempting to lead souls astray by means of his vile calumnies against the Church—against all religions, indeed! And Hilda did not even know who he was! Redman had kept it from her, of course. His books are on the Index,' she concluded in a lower tone.

Lady Gwendolen sighed.

'I do not see what can be done,' she replied. 'Marriage with a Protestant must necessarily expose Hilda to meeting irreligious people. It is one of the things I always dreaded for her. I used to tell you so, mamma, if you remember, before the engagement was settled.'

'Did you, Gwen? I dare say,' said Lady Merton indifferently. 'But to return to Mr. Shirley: he is a person whom no Catholic ought to be asked to meet.'

Lady Merton gave a defiant breadth to the 'a' in 'Catholic' which was redolent of orthodoxy.

'You must warn Hilda against him,' she continued; 'he is a most dangerous man, plausible, clever—one of Satan's angels, in fact.'

'She can't prevent Walter asking his friends,' objected Lady Gwendolen.

Lady Merton folded her hands together on her lap. They were beautifully shaped hands, smooth and rounded, not at all the hands of an old woman.

'She must be made to see that it is her duty to exert all her influence in order to eliminate such friends from his life,' she replied. 'I do not think that Hilda's letters have been at all satisfactory since she married,' she continued. 'I have looked in vain for any allusions in

them to what, after all, ought to be the great object of her existence, and the questions I asked her in my letters have always remained unanswered.'

'Hilda is perfectly happy, at any rate,' said Lady Gwendolen. 'I was much struck by that when I was last here.'

'Of course she is happy; she has everything to make her so from a worldly point of view. I didn't suppose Redman would ill-treat her because she was a Catholic; but happiness is not the question. I fear that Hilda has been neglecting the duty which this marriage imposed upon her. However, we shall very soon see how things are progressing, though Mr. Shirley's presence here is not an encouraging sign. Yes, Spencer, I am coming directly. A quarter to eight, is it? Gwen, I must go and dress, and so must you. I hope you will take an early opportunity of telling Redman how greatly you deplore that Hilda should be brought into contact with such a person as Mr. Shirley. How can we expect our prayers to be answered if we allow her to be exposed—— No, a low body, of course, Spencer. Gwen, we shall be horribly late for dinner!' and Lady Merton disappeared into the dressing-room.

The following day was Christmas Eve. The cold was keener than ever, and the snow had been frozen to a crisp, dry powder which was pleasant to walk and drive upon. It had been arranged that the men of the party were to shoot the woods at Redman's Cross that day, and though the snow would interfere with the sport, and add considerably to the difficulties of beating and bringing the game properly up to the guns, the majority of the men to whom Walter Redman had put the choice the night before in the smoking-room of

adhering to the arrangements or deferring them until the weather was more favourable voted for the former. Many of them were anxious to see the old deer-park and its famous oaks, and to catch a glimpse, if possible, of the herd of wild goats which roamed about its more sequestered spots, and which had been a feature of the place since the time of Richard II., who, according to certain documents preserved in the muniment-room at Abbotsbury, had presented the Redman of the day with its progenitors, in acknowledgment of a mighty hunting at Redman's Cross in which the monarch had taken part.

The brilliant sunshine and crisp, invigorating air made Hilda suggest that such of the ladies as cared to make the expedition should drive over to luncheon with the shooters. The plan was voted a delightful one, and even Lady Merton, when she heard that the meal would be eaten in the house of the head forester, a portion of which was fitted up as a shooting lodge, expressed her determination to accompany the party.

Abbotsbury was a carefully organized establishment, and Lord Redman liked to have everything well done in each department of it. The shooters breakfasted together, and at nine o'clock an omnibus and a pair of powerful, well-bred bays came round, and Walter mounted the box and took the reins himself. A little before twelve o'clock an open break, drawn by four horses, with a couple of postilions, clad in the dark-blue and orange liveries of the Redmans, was waiting at the hall-door for Hilda and the ladies, and a landau for Lady Merton and any other guest who might feel the cold too great for driving in an open carriage.

The parks of Abbotsbury and Redman's Cross almost

joined each other, although the distance between the two places was some six or seven miles. The latter, however, was entirely different in its characteristics from the domain which surrounded Abbotsbury. The carriages swept between two ancient stone lodges, ivy-clad and battlemented, with deep mullioned windows, and surmounted by the goats which formed the crest and supporters of the Redman family. Once within the gates, the scenery changed, and the occupants of the carriages looked upon a tract of country such as characterized the England of Saxon and Norman times. Mighty oaks, with their gnarled and wide-spreading boughs, stood up gaunt and black against the snow-covered banks; and withered bracken, russet-coloured, covered the ground, relieved here and there by patches of vivid scarlet, where bramble-leaves nestled in the undergrowth. Clumps of venerable hollies, which had attained to the size and dignity of forest-trees, held the snowflakes sparkling in the sunlight between their prickly foliage, and every now and then a stag or a fallow-deer would start out of the fern and bound away to closer covert, frightened by the thud of the horses' hoofs and the ring of the carriage-wheels on the frozen ground. Away in the hollow a pool of water stood, wild and solitary-looking as that over which King Arthur passed to his rest. The ghostly stems of stunted birch-trees, and patches of heather, among which broods of black game still lingered, dotted its shores, and the wildfowl flocked to it in the hard weather, knowing that the springs by which it was fed prevented it from ever being entirely ice-bound.

As the carriages passed through the glades of the old chase, Lady Redman pointed out some of the more

famous oaks to her guests—the Beggar's Oak, which was mentioned as a landmark in Domesday Book; the King's Oak, and the Venison Oak, around each of which hung popular legends and traditions of centuries long dead.

It was nearly one o'clock when they drove up to the door of the forest lodge at Redman's Cross, where the shooters were to join them at luncheon. The room in which the table was laid was in keeping with its sylvan surroundings. The high roof was supported by rafters of ancient oak, fashioned, perhaps, from fallen limbs of the trees which the party had just looked upon. On the walls, panelled with the same timber, hung the antlers of red and fallow deer, and the curved horns and wicked-looking skulls of departed patriarchs of the herd of wild goats. Between these were specimens of bows of yew and arrows of box-wood, which had laid many a fat buck low in the olden days, when a man in those parts often depended upon his woodcraft for his supper.

'What a possession!' exclaimed Mr. Shirley enthusiastically. He did not shoot, and had accompanied the occupants of the break, which, with its four horses, had arrived at the lodge before the more sober landau. 'I had no idea,' he continued, 'that so perfect a bit of medieval England was in existence, and still less that it was to be found in Staffordshire.'

'Staffordshire is not all Black Country and Potteries,' said Hilda, smiling. 'I wish you could see Redman's Cross in autumn,' she added; 'the snow and the bare trees give it quite a different effect.'

'No doubt,' answered Mr. Shirley; 'but the effect suits it. It is strong, and northern, like the oak-trees.

Look at those men,' he continued, 'coming in with their abominable breech-loading guns under their arms. If I were Redman, I would insist upon everybody who shot at Redman's Cross using those bows and arrows.'

'I am afraid the game-larder at Abbotsbury would be very empty,' replied Hilda, laughing. 'Are you so reactionary in your ideas, Mr. Shirley?'

Her husband entered the room at this moment, followed by the other guns.

'Shirley a reactionary!' he said. 'This is a new departure, Ned,' he added, laughing. 'What strange sentiments have you been expounding?'

'You are all to put away your guns and shoot with bows and arrows for the remainder of the day,' said Hilda. 'Mr. Shirley is shocked at anything so modern as breech-loaders being used at Redman's Cross.'

'He shall try his fourteenth-century weapons on my nineteenth-century pheasants after luncheon if he likes, said Lord Redman.

'Reactionary ideas,' said Mr. Shirley, 'are very seldom put into practice by those who advocate them. Look at our Socialists, for example.'

The luncheon party was a merry one. The food was as good and varied as though it were being served in the dining-room at Abbotsbury; for no sooner had Hilda suggested that they should drive over to Redman's Cross that morning, than all the necessary materials for the meal had been despatched thither, together with one of the cooks to give the finishing touches to the different hot dishes of which it was composed.

Lady Merton sat and ate her luncheon in a very complacent frame of mind. Being Christmas Eve, and, therefore, a fast-day, such things as cutlets and

game-pie were forbidden to her; but there was no lack of *maigre* dishes—cunningly-prepared eggs and varieties of fish and vegetables—which were a very acceptable substitute for flesh meats. She expressed her fears that the flavour of some of these had been assisted by an irreligious admixture of stock, but Lord Redman assured her that his cook was French, and he felt sure, therefore, incapable of so inciting to crime the Catholic members of the party, for whom *maigre* fare had been specially ordered.

Lady Merton had been mistress of a large establishment herself during her husband's life, and her dower-house of Ware was admirably managed. She appreciated the organization of Abbotsbury, and the scale of ease and comfort upon which everything was mounted. She congratulated herself, as she glanced at Hilda sitting smiling and happy at the end of the table, on having settled her grand-daughter very satisfactorily in the world, and she was well aware that, had it not been for her, Lady Gwendolen would never have so far overcome her objections to Hilda marrying a Protestant as to sanction the alliance with Lord Redman, notwithstanding all that the latter was able to bestow on his wife.

Luncheon over, Lord Redman hurried the shooters away to their work. The shortness of the December afternoons did not admit of any time being wasted. Some of the ladies of the party accompanied the guns to their respective posts; but Hilda disliked looking on at shooting, and she volunteered to show Lady Merton, Mr. Shirley, and others who did not care to stand about with the guns, some of the big trees, and the famous bloodhounds in the kennels behind the lodge.

Lady Merton walked rather more slowly than the rest, and her grand-daughter remained with her, after directing the others to the path which would lead them to the Beggar's Oak.

'It is a great pleasure to find you so happy and with everything that this world can give, dear Hilda,' said Lady Merton, in her gentle, caressing tones, as Mr. Shirley and his companions disappeared among the trees.

'I do not think anybody could be happier than I am,' answered Hilda simply.

'Ah!' continued Lady Merton. 'Happiness is a great gift—a most undeserved blessing,' and she gave a little sigh; 'but, my dear child, it has its dangers.'

'Its dangers?'

'Grave dangers,' repeated Lady Merton. 'We are so apt to allow it to make us forget our responsibilities.'

'I hope Walter and I shall not do that,' answered Hilda. 'You have no idea,' she continued, 'how keenly sensible he is of his duties as a large proprietor, and how all the people about here respect and love him. I am only anxious to do my part as his wife, though, of course, as yet I feel a comparative stranger in the place.'

'That is very right—very proper. But I was not thinking of your responsibilities to your husband's people, but of those to your husband himself. I could not be happy if I were married to a man who was not a Catholic, Hilda.'

'But,' said Lady Redman, 'we had both taken that question into consideration before we married.'

Lady Merton gave her a little glance from beneath half-closed eyelids.

'Of course. But what are considerations in comparison to the safety of a human soul?' she replied, after a slight pause.

'Let us call them promises—mutual promises, not considerations,' said Hilda.

Lady Merton stooped and disengaged a bramble from her skirt.

'My dear Hilda,' she remarked, 'call them what you will, but the fact remains that a wife who is a good Catholic has no right to be happy so long as her husband remains outside the Church. Besides, your mutual promises, as you choose to call them, were not mutual at all. The Church demanded that your husband should agree to certain stipulations. Had he not done so, your marriage could not have taken place. You must recollect that those stipulations did not proceed from you, they proceeded from the Church.'

'Even so,' replied Hilda, 'Walter would not have agreed to them had I not promised to agree to his own.'

'You agreed—yes,' said Lady Merton; 'but with the mental reservation—a very necessary one under the circumstances—that you would use all the influence you might possess over your husband to compass his conversion in the future.'

Hilda was silent. She could not deny that, during her engagement, she had always clung to the idea that Walter's conversion would be effected through her love for him. It was the first time, however, that this feeling, which had seemed to her to be but a part of her love, had struck her in the light of a mental reservation.

'And Walter?' she said, at length. 'He might lay claim to mental reservations on his side.'

'Exactly,' answered Lady Merton. 'He might do so. I am not sure,' she added slowly, 'that there are not already signs of his doing so. It is this point upon which I feel it is my duty to put you on your guard, Hilda.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Hilda, smiling, 'you are quite mistaken there. Nobody could be more scrupulous than Walter in allowing me full liberty to practise my religion. Indeed, the subject is never mentioned between us. He goes to his church—at least, he sometimes goes—and I go to mine.'

'That is just the danger. The subject, you say, is never mentioned between you. You resign all the influence which you ought to have—which it is your duty to have—over your husband. But are you sure that he is not all the while exercising a silent influence over you, and causing you to forget the duty you owe to God and to the Church? I think you are deceiving yourself, Hilda. You talked very differently before your marriage, when we spoke of these things together.'

'I cannot think what you mean,' said Hilda wonderingly. 'As I have said before, Walter is most careful never to allude to the difference in our beliefs. Even the Russells, who might naturally resent the fact of my being a Catholic, never interfere with me in any way. Indeed, Mary Russell is the only person to whom I ever open my lips on the subject, and, though she makes no secret of being a strong Protestant, I think that she is in reality very much interested in the Church. She often asks me questions about it, and lately I lent her

some books. She said she wished to read something on our side.'

'Poor thing!' said Lady Merton. 'A parson's wife is in a ridiculous position. What was it Queen Elizabeth said to the wife of the man who called himself Archbishop of Canterbury? "'Madam' I may not call you, and 'mistress' I am loath to call you." But, to return to Walter, I would much rather that he asked you questions as Mrs. Russell does. It would be far more satisfactory, even if he disagreed with your answers. I confess that I distrust this method of apparently ignoring so vital a subject. It is a subtile attempt to inoculate you with his own indifference to such things.'

Hilda began to feel uncomfortable. Lady Merton was putting into words ideas which her own conscience, trained to be supersensitive by those who had moulded and directed it from childhood, had been suggesting to her of late.

'There is another thing,' pursued Lady Merton, apparently unconscious of her grand-daughter's embarrassment, 'which makes us all very uneasy. Walter has no right to expose you to the presence of such a man as Mr. Shirley. I was horrified to find him a guest in your house, Hilda.'

'He is a great friend of my husband,' said the latter, 'but I hardly know him. Walter introduced him to me in London before we were married. As you heard, I did not even know that he wrote.'

'No,' replied Lady Merton. 'That is what I cannot forgive your husband. He should have told you, and at least have given you the option of declining to know a man whose writings have been condemned as pernicious and immoral, and whom no Catholic ought to meet.'

'I will never interfere with Walter's friends, or refuse to receive them,' said Lady Redman, speaking with more determination than she had hitherto done.

Lady Merton's eyes drooped, with a peculiar, deprecating expression acquired in the course of periodical retreats in conventual establishments.

'Ah, well, my dear child,' she replied gently, 'I have done my duty in warning you of what I believe to be dangers and troubles in store for you. God grant,' she continued in a lower tone, 'that you may some day realize more fully than you seem to do at present that in your hands lies the possibility of saving the soul of the husband you profess to love, and, through his example, perhaps of numberless others. 'Come,' she added, 'let us walk a little quicker and overtake the others, now that we have had our little talk.'

CHAPTER VI

'PROFESSIONAL saints are very tiresome people,' said Lord Redman, pocketing the red ball with somewhat unnecessary violence.

'I have always thought so,' replied Mr. Shirley. 'Amateur sinners are much more interesting.'

The two were alone together in the billiard-room at Abbotsbury, the remainder of the men having gone to bed, leaving them to finish their game.

Lord Redman spotted the red and continued his break.

'I wish you would tell my respected grandmother-in-law so,' he said presently, with a slight laugh.

'I am afraid it would have no effect,' remarked Mr. Shirley. 'Lady Merton regards me as the most professional of sinners. I believe that she would like to sprinkle me with holy-water. But why are you annoyed with her?'

'Because she is unable to forget her profession,' answered Lord Redman.

Mr. Shirley shrugged his shoulders.

'She has a reputation to keep up,' he said dryly.

'I wish that she would give herself a holiday at Abbotsbury,' replied Lord Redman. 'What an extraordinary thing religion is, Ned!' he continued. 'Why can't people let each other alone about it, and not think

that they are the only ones on terms of particular intimacy with the Almighty ?'

'For a very simple reason: The Almighty is everyone's own particular creation. The man who makes the puppet surely has the right to pull the wires.'

Walter Redman laughed.

'Oh,' he returned, 'I know that you are a hopeless person to talk to on these subjects. You are on so serene a level of——'

'Of what ?'

'Well, upon my word, I hardly know ! Atheism, I suppose.'

'By no means,' said Mr. Shirley emphatically. 'There is no such thing as atheism in the world. Those who profess it make a deity of themselves; and this deity which they make is neither more nor less a true god than the deity of the Churches. He remains pitiably human.'

'I am afraid you have been giving Lady Merton some of your sentiments.'

'No; I never talk about these things to strangers. Lady Merton attacked me on the subject of my writings yesterday. I told her that, as they had been placed upon the Index, I was surprised she had read them.'

'What did she say ?'

'Well,' replied Mr. Shirley, smiling. 'I don't think she liked the remark. She told me, however, that she had a dispensation to read works condemned by the Congregation of the Index. It was a privilege, so she assured me, granted to her as a student and writer on questions of faith.'

'Lady Merton has a very vivid imagination,' said Walter.

'So I have always understood. I suppose that many very religious people have. I soon learned, however, that she had not availed herself of her dispensation so far as I was concerned, but only of her imagination. Has she been complaining of me?' added Mr. Shirley, laughing.

'Of you? No; but of me for exposing her granddaughter to such dangerous influences as those which she thinks you exercise. Shall I be frank with you, Ned? My relations-in-law have made a little scene. They say that I purposely kept my wife in ignorance of the fact that you are, as they express it, an infidel writer, and that I am interfering with her faith, in an indirect but none the less subtile manner, by bringing her into contact with people holding your views.'

Mr. Shirley smiled. 'Under the circumstances,' he said, 'the best thing I can do is to remove my dangerous person from your house as soon as possible.'

Walter Redman's face assumed the determined expression characteristic of some of the family portraits at Abbotsbury.

'No!' he replied decidedly. 'No, Ned. You will oblige me very much by doing nothing of the sort.'

'But Lady Redman——'

'Is not her grandmother. My wife has not alluded to the subject to me, nor I to her.'

Mr. Shirley was silent for a few moments.

'Lady Redman does not appear to me to be—well, a bigoted person,' he said presently. 'I have been rather surprised, knowing the surroundings in which she must have been brought up, to find a certain breadth of vision in her. We have had some conversation together, and she interested me very much. Your wife is a person who thinks, Walter.'

Walter Redman shrugged his shoulders a little impatiently.

'Yes,' he answered, 'she thinks. But does it not strike you as unfortunate that circumstances should oblige her to be silent to her husband concerning her thoughts on certain matters?'

'The circumstances apply equally to yourself.'

'They do, and that is the worst of it. Our damned religions stand in the way of any interchange of ideas on the more serious things of life.'

Mr. Shirley looked keenly at his companion. He was not a married man himself, nor even one who had experienced the necessity of the presence in his life of another mind with which his own could freely mingle. He had sought for his intercommunion of ideas rather among his books and his studies than among beings of flesh and blood. Nevertheless, his knowledge of human nature, and a certain quick sympathy with its needs and cravings which a profound observation of humanity had caused him to possess, gave him an instant clue to the state of mind which he was convinced had prompted Walter Redman's last remark.

'Already?' he said to himself. 'As Lady Redman has made no objection to my being a guest in her house, I should certainly not wish to curtail my visit,' he observed, after a pause. 'To do so would be to admit the right of others to interfere between you and your wife.'

Lord Redman nodded.

'I am glad that you understand,' he said.

Mr. Shirley went to a little table, and mixed himself a whisky-and-soda with some deliberation.

'My dear Walter,' he said, 'it is always a delicate

matter, even for an old friend, to talk to a man about his wife, but you have in a manner encouraged me to do so.'

'Go ahead, and don't apologize, Ned!' said Lord Redman, knocking the balls about the billiard-table.

'Well, to speak plainly, I think that you are unconsciously drifting into a rather critical position. In the first place, you have married a woman who is very fond of you.'

'As I am of her.'

'I know it. You both of you thought when you married that your mutual affection would neutralize conflicting opinions upon what are called religious matters. It doesn't.'

'It should do so, were it not for outside interference, which, as you implied just now, cannot be admitted.'

'No—pardon me—it will do nothing of the kind. It will have the reverse effect.'

'What do you mean, Ned?'

'Precisely what I say. Your very love for each other will create the critical position for you both in which you will find yourselves placed before long. The outside interference to which you allude will merely be a secondary factor in the bringing about of that position. Take my advice, Walter: should difficulties arise between you, look in the right quarter if you wish to discover both their origin and their solution, but do not expect to find the latter in your love for each other.'

'Then where should I look for it?'

'In yourself partly, but principally, unless I am much mistaken, in your wife.'

'Is not that something of a truism?' asked Walter, smiling.

'I believe not. Lady Redman is a woman who, sooner or later, will think for herself. Up to now others have thought for her; that is the system of Roman Catholicism—the system which has kept the nations which are under its influence at a dead-level of ignorance and intellectual stagnation, even though individuals belonging to those nations have emancipated themselves from its yoke.'

'But you are going too fast, Ned,' objected Lord Redman. 'You assume that Hilda has a desire to exercise her own private judgment. I should be very glad to think that the necessity for doing so would ever present itself to her. I am afraid, on the contrary, that the old hereditary ties and influences will be strong enough to crush any incipient desire which she might have to think for herself. It may be my imagination,' he continued, lighting a fresh cigar, 'but during the last few days, since her family have been round her, I have thought that Hilda seemed a little grave and preoccupied, as though something were troubling her. I should not have regarded it, probably, had it not been that, as I told you, Lady Merton considered it necessary to expostulate with me on your presence here, and to tell me that Hilda should have been informed that you were—yourself. She even went so far as to hint that I was not acting up to my promises not to interfere with her grand-daughter's religion, and Lady Gwendolen agreed with her.'

'But Lady Redman?' asked Mr. Shirley. 'You say that she has said nothing to you of all this?'

'Not a word. But, putting two and two together, it

is probable that these women have been talking to her, and if so, that would account for the worried look I have noticed in her face during the last day or two.'

Mr. Shirley smiled.

'I think,' he said, 'that Lady Redman took the first step towards liberty of thought when she decided to marry you. I remember you told me how greatly opposed her family were to the idea, and that in spite of this opposition she persisted in her determination.'

'Yes; but without Lady Merton's assistance the marriage would never have taken place. That is the odd part of it,' added Walter. 'She smoothed away all the difficulties which the Cawardens made before sanctioning our engagement, and now that we are married it looks very much as though she were the first person on my wife's side to try and make mischief. As for my not having told Hilda all about you, that is a ridiculous grievance to bring forward. I did not do so because I should have had to talk upon subjects which we were both pledged to avoid. Moreover,' continued Lord Redman, 'if my wife chose to invite a Bishop to Abbotsbury I should have no objection. We are each absolutely free so far as the choice of our friends is concerned.'

'From all I have ever heard of Lady Merton,' observed Mr. Shirley, 'I should say that she has invariably kept one eye upon the next world and the other upon eldest sons in this. I am not at all surprised at her having done her best to further your engagement. She allowed one of her daughters to marry that drunken brute, Wearmouth. A mother who could have done that would give her daughter to any man who had enough to offer.'

'But the Duchess of Wearmouth was not a Catholic. I do not see her motive for worrying Hilda now that we are married,' persisted Walter.

'It is because you are married,' returned Mr. Shirley briefly.

Lord Redman swore a little oath under his breath.

'Well,' he said, 'I mean to put a stop to anything of that kind at the beginning. Hilda was perfectly happy till her relations came here, and, let alone, she would be so always.'

'Are you so sure of that?'

'As sure as I am of my own happiness.'

'I think you are mistaken,' replied Mr. Shirley quietly, 'and if I were you I should not attempt to interfere between your wife and her family.'

'But that is absurd, my dear fellow.'

'Not so absurd as it seems. We have agreed that Lady Redman is a woman who thinks on certain matters?'

'Yes.'

'Well, let her think.'

'I don't know what you are driving at, Ned.'

'I will try to explain. Your wife is not like her aunt, the Duchess of Wearmouth; she married you because she loved you. It is evident that Lady Merton's worldliness could have had no influence over her in her choice of a husband.'

'No, I am thankful to say.'

'But yet,' continued Mr. Shirley, 'Lady Merton in a way brought about your marriage. I am afraid, Walter,' he continued, with an amused look, 'that her ladyship's other eye was upon you—the heavenly one, I mean. She had marked you down for conversion,

hence her goodwill towards her grand-daughter's affection for you.'

Walter burst out laughing.

'But, my dear fellow, nothing could have been clearer than my explanations on that subject. The whole family, including Hilda herself, knew perfectly well that the latter was not marrying a staunch Protestant who might be converted, but a nondescript kind of article like myself.'

'That would make no difference. Indeed, it would be a greater triumph for the Church to secure you. Listen to me, Walter. Let your wife think. The more her Catholic relations attempt to interfere with her, the more she will be divided between her love for you and her wish to be loyal to your mutual compact on the one side, and her devotion to her Church on the other. Any endeavour on your part to combat their interference would weaken your position. Remember that Lady Redman will have to struggle against very complex feelings. Who knows that this mental struggle has not already begun—that it did not begin, indeed, directly you were man and wife? She is a Catholic, fresh from the peculiar psychological surroundings of that religion. You are not dealing with her mind as yet; you are dealing with a mould, fashioned partly by heredity, partly by the priests. The belief in that God which the latter have created, and in the supernatural beings around Him, is to her the pivot of her existence. To please Him is to secure everlasting happiness; to offend Him, everlasting pain.'

'You are giving God a bad character,' said Lord Redman.

'I am giving Him the character which the priests

attribute to Him,' returned Mr. Shirley. 'They are unable to make a god except in their own image. He is not your God, nor mine,' he added more gently; 'but let that pass. What I was going to say was: Think how cruel a deprivation it must be, to a mind thus trained, to be debarred from all intercourse on such vital subjects with the being it loves. Why, it must be a deprivation even to you, Walter;' and Mr. Shirley gave his companion a quick, penetrating glance, which, nevertheless, had something very kindly in its expression.

Lord Redman did not meet his gaze. 'You ought to be a married man, Ned,' he said, with a short laugh.

Mr. Shirley lighted a candle preparatory to going upstairs to his room.

'It is rather presumption on my part to offer you advice as to how to conduct your own domestic affairs,' he replied, with a smile.

'I believe that your advice is very sound,' said Walter. 'I am not sure,' he added slowly, 'but I think so. Time will show.'

'Yes, time will show. But, in the meanwhile, be patient, Walter. You will have to watch the struggle going on in your wife's mind. Devoted to her Church, and believing, as the priests and her education have taught her, that in it alone is to be found the Divine truth, the consciousness that her husband is outside that Church will be an ever-present sorrow to her. Devoted to you, learning every day to know you better, and to realize that your happiness and peace of mind are not dependent upon dogmatic faith, she will shrink from the responsibility of introducing disturbing elements into that happiness.'

'But if the action of others compels her to place the supposed interest of my soul before any other consideration?'

Mr. Shirley paused in his walk towards the door of the billiard-room.

'Ah!' he replied slowly, 'that will be the crisis of the struggle. We are hardly able to determine the force of the influences which may be brought to bear upon your wife. Remember that behind her may be ranged all that subtle psychological power which the Roman Church so well knows how to wield—the exploitation of that enervating fear of the unknown which is implanted, in a greater or less degree, in us all. There is one force, and one only, which may neutralize, and eventually overpower, the latter, but the process will be a very disturbing one. Not the least conflicting element in it will be that very one to which you have both of you looked as a certain resolvent of all your difficulties.'

'I understand,' said Walter, 'but, if I am not mistaken, you began by saying that I was not to look to this element for a solution of any problems which might arise in our lives owing to the fact of Hilda being a Catholic and myself a nominal Protestant.'

'You are not mistaken; I did say so. The solution, if it comes at all, will do so through the gradual emancipation of your wife's powers of thought and judgment from the ties by which they have hitherto been bound. Your mutual love will be an all-important factor in promoting this emancipation, but, in the first instance, it will retard it. The influences which will be at work upon Lady Redman will quickly seize upon her love and make it serve their own end. That is why I

preach patience to you,' added Mr. Shirley—'patience and reliance, not upon affection only, but still more upon that emancipation from mental bondage without which Lady Redman's love could only have the effect of widening the gulf that you both feel exists between you.'

Lord Redman looked at his friend attentively.

'What leads you to suppose this?' he asked after a pause. 'You have only been three or four days in the house with Hilda—not long enough to have learned so much of her character.'

Mr. Shirley smiled.

'You have put two and two together about Lady Merton,' he replied, 'and I have done the same thing about Lady Redman. As I told you, we have had some conversation together, and, though of course she did not talk to me about these things, I believe I have some sort of idea as to her state of mind. Besides, your cousin, Mrs. Russell, has spoken a good deal to me of Lady Redman. It appears that they are great friends, and I think perhaps the latter has felt she could speak more freely to Mrs. Russell on certain matters than to anybody else at Abbotsbury.'

'Well,' said Walter, 'I suppose things will settle themselves somehow, but I don't like to feel that all these old women, egged on by their confessors, may be putting their heads together to make my wife unhappy, hoping thereby to make a Catholic of me. I will take your advice, however, and do nothing. Come, Ned,' he added, turning out the lights over the billiard-table, 'let us go to bed, and send dogma to the devil, with whom I verily believe it originates.'

The two men went upstairs together, and Lord

Redman bade Mr. Shirley good-night and went to his own rooms.

Mr. Shirley sat himself down opposite the fire in his bedroom, which the keen frost without was causing to glow hot and fiercely.

'Walter will need all his skill to steer a safe course ahead,' he said to himself. 'The priests have their eyes upon Abbotsbury, and they won't care about having to wait until Walter's son succeeds, if he has one. The son—— Ah! that's where the rub will come, though it was no good saying anything to Walter about it now. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."' And then he fell into a meditation.

CHAPTER VII

THE ball given to the tenantry and principal *employés* of the Abbotsbury estate concluded the round of Christmastide festivities at which Lord and Lady Redman had so hospitably entertained their neighbours of every condition of life. The Barons' Hall blazed with the light of innumerable wax-candles; garlands of holly and mistletoe adorned the dark oaken roof, and twined between its massive beams and rafters; while King John, pen in hand, with the scroll of Magna Charta before him, scowled upon the varied throng of dancers on the floor beneath.

The upper domestics of Abbotsbury moved pompously through the crowd, fearful lest they should lose for a moment the sense of their own dignity and importance by mingling with their subordinates, their whole manner clearly expressing the fact that their affability was a tribute to the exigencies of the occasion, and was not to be presumed upon or misinterpreted. The trades-people of Trentford, sleek and prosperous-looking, with black coats closely buttoned, and tight shoes written all over their countenances, stood by their wives and watched their daughters going 'down the middle and up again' with the young farmers in 'The Triumph,' or threading the intricate mazes of the 'Corn Riggs.' Then there were groups of local clergy and their better

halves, and the local representatives of law, finance, and medical science. Wandering from one to the other of these groups was the wife of the well-to-do draper in the market-place, who had built himself a villa on the Stafford Road, which, on the strength of two recently-planted Wellingtonias, bore the name of 'The Elms' painted in Gothic characters on its front gate. 'My pa,' Mrs. Greensmith was in the habit of informing her acquaintances, 'was a medical man'; and so, on public occasions, she made a point of asserting her right to enter the professional circles of Trentford.

The guests who most thoroughly enjoyed themselves were undoubtedly those to whom the social ambitions of Trentford and the etiquette of the housekeeper's room were matters of secondary importance. The tenants and the outdoor servants of Abbotsbury came to the ball with the firm intention of spending a cheerful evening, and they succeeded in doing so.

Mr. Tomlinson, the dissenting farmer, to be sure, had scruples of conscience as to whether the act of dancing were not a concession to concupiscence; nevertheless, his face beamed with pride and pleasure when, at the commencement of the proceedings, Lady Redman came up to him and said that she hoped he would dance the opening country dance with her. He compromised with Satan by making no attempt at steps, for which his partner was grateful; but the compromise necessitated an awkward run with his hostess 'down the middle and up again' through the double line of the dancers, on the execution and effect of which Hilda had afterwards to receive the sarcastic compliments of her husband and the party staying in the house.

'It is very unfortunate,' said Mr. Russell to his wife, as they watched the scene, 'that the Tomlinsons should be placed in such a prominent position. It is hard upon the Church people to see dissenters being put over their heads. I wish Redman would recognise the necessity in these days of supporting the claims of the Established Church.'

'He hasn't taken them into consideration in choosing his wife, so I don't see why you expect him to do so in minor details,' replied Mrs. Russell in an undertone.

'I have nothing to say against Lady Redman,' returned the Rector. 'I must confess that she conducts herself admirably. It is a very strange thing, but I often think that she shows more anxiety to promote the influence of her husband's religion in the parish than her husband himself does. What do you think of all these Roman Catholics, Mary,' he added, 'now that you have seen more of them?'

'I think them charming,' answered Mary Russell, 'especially Lady Merton. I like Lady Gwendolen, too, very much; but Lady Merton is delightful—so interesting to talk to, and such a *grande dame!*'

The Rector laughed pleasantly.

'Be careful, my dear,' he said. 'She has a great reputation for making converts—at least, so Mr. Shirley tells me.'

'I hope, James,' replied Mrs. Russell with dignity, 'that I am not so weak in my religion as to be perverted by the first Romanist whom I happen to find an agreeable person.'

Her husband glanced at her with some surprise.

'Of course not,' he said, smiling. 'I was only joking. I know you have a horror of them all, as far as their

doctrine is concerned—more so, indeed, than I have—eh, Mary?'

Mrs. Russell hesitated a little.

'One understands people's ideas better when one has been brought into contact with them,' she replied. 'Certainly they believe in some things which I could never accept as truth—never,' she repeated decidedly, 'but——'

'They are not so black as they are painted,' interrupted the Rector. 'That,' he continued, 'I have always held. Individual Roman Catholics, however, are one thing, and Romanism is another. It is the system which is anti-Scriptural and altogether abominable.'

Mary Russell did not reply, and at that moment Lady Merton approached them.

'I think I have done my duty,' she said to Mrs. Russell, with a little smile. 'I have talked about the weather, prize stock, and babies, and I have danced a quadrille with the butler. Shall we leave this perspiring humanity for a little while, and go and sit down in one of the other rooms? There is always a moment at these entertainments when the odour of hair-oil becomes oppressive.'

Mary Russell was quite ready to do so, and the two wandered through the various drawing-rooms together, until they eventually found themselves in the gallery, which, save for two or three couples who were looking at the pictures and the ornaments which it contained, was deserted.

Lady Merton sat down in an armchair by one of the fire-places at the further end of the room.

'These functions are always tiring,' she said. 'Every-

one feels they must talk, and no one quite knows what to talk about.'

'For an outsider they must be not only tiring but tiresome as well,' replied Mary Russell. 'Of course, when one knows all the people's home-life and interests it makes it much easier.'

'Naturally,' said Lady Merton. 'At Ware,' she continued, 'we had a ball of this kind every year; but it was not given upon this scale. I must say that everything is done *en prince* at Abbotsbury. It is very satisfactory to see how popular your cousin is with all the people here.'

'Oh yes, he is popular, certainly,' replied Mrs. Russell. 'You know, Lady Merton, a Redman would have to be a very bad specimen of his race not to be popular about here. There is a great feeling for the family in this part of the county. I must say,' she added, 'Walter deserves his popularity. He is a most kind and just landlord.'

'How nice!' said Lady Merton absently; and then she gave Mrs. Russell one of her exploratory glances. 'And Hilda? I hope she is liked also. She seems to be having a great success to-night.'

'I am sure that she already shares Walter's popularity,' answered Mary Russell. 'But——' she added, and then she stopped abruptly.

'Ah!' said Lady Merton. 'I know what you were going to say. The difference of religion naturally makes her position a little difficult. These divisions are so sad, so unnecessary. If people would only read their Bibles and believe, everyone would be united.'

'Their Bibles?' repeated Mrs. Russell.

'Certainly—their Bibles,' said Lady Merton. There

was the faintest touch of asperity in her voice, for Mary Russell's question had in it an accent of surprise and incredulity. 'My grand-daughter tells me,' she continued, 'that you are interested in our holy religion, Mrs. Russell. I am sure that, in the present unhappy state of her husband's mind regarding such matters, it is a great comfort to Hilda to have anybody like yourself to whom she can sometimes talk on these things, even though, unfortunately, you are not one of us.'

'I am interested—yes. But, Lady Merton, Hilda will have told you that I am a strong believer in my own Church.'

'She told me that you were very prejudiced,' replied Lady Merton; 'but, then, prejudice is so often the result of ignorance.' From anybody else's lips but Lady Merton's these words would have sounded discourteous, but the gentle and deprecatory tone in which they were spoken made it impossible for Mary Russell to feel offended. 'You must remember, my dear Mrs. Russell, that I was once a Protestant myself, so I know better than most people how true my words are,' she continued.

Mary Russell was silent. Of late more than one of her pet prejudices had turned out to be born of ignorance.

'I am glad,' she said, after a pause, during which Lady Merton sat and watched her quietly, 'that Hilda finds it some relief to talk to me. I am often sorry for her, for I can understand that it must be trying to her to feel that she and her husband are so opposed to each other on spiritual matters.'

'It is very sad,' said Lady Merton, sighing. 'Poor dear Hilda! Her letters have been full of anxiety con-

cerning her husband's state of mind. She feels it acutely, but it is very difficult for us to help her. You see, any attempt on our part to do so would be immediately to lay ourselves and her open to the suspicion that we were trying to convert him.'

'But surely,' said Mrs. Russell wonderingly, 'that Walter should join your Church is what you would all wish?'

Lady Merton laughed—a soft, musical little laugh.

'My dear,' she replied, 'when you know us Catholics better you will realize that the idea that we are always striving after conversions is another of your prejudices. The grace to find the truth does not come from us—it comes from God. Conversions are brought about not, as our enemies would have it, by personal influence, but by the free exercise on the part of the convert of his or her powers of reason, directed, as I have just said, by the grace of God. All that we who possess the inestimable privilege and blessing of being within the Church can do is to extend a helping hand to those without by endeavouring to dispel their ignorance of the Church's doctrines, if they require such assistance of us. We are merely instruments of the Divine Will, acting, it may be quite unconsciously, to further the Divine ends.'

'I did not know——' began Mrs. Russell.

Her companion interrupted her.

'No,' she said gently; 'of course you did not know. We Catholics, alas! are well accustomed to be judged by people who do not know, as our Master was. But do not let us drift into a discussion on these points,' continued Lady Merton. 'What I wanted to say to you has nothing to do with this subject, except very

indirectly. I think, Mrs. Russell, that it is in your power to be of great service both to your cousin and to his wife.'

'I am afraid that I do not see how,' replied Mary Russell; 'for, as you say, I am not one of you.'

'That is the very reason.'

'How do you mean, Lady Merton?'

'Hilda can talk to you freely—all the more freely, perhaps, because you are of the same Church to which her husband nominally belongs. Nobody could suppose that you, the wife of the Rector of Abbotsbury, were attempting to convert Lord Redman to Catholicism if you tried to make him understand how greatly Hilda is grieving over his materialism, and at the thought that he is surrounded by such dangerous friends as Mr. Shirley, for instance.'

'But Hilda has never confided her anxieties to me,' objected Mary Russell. 'I feel sure that she is supremely happy. I confess I have sometimes wondered that she does not seem to mind the fact of her husband being of a different religion from her own.'

'Ah!' replied Lady Merton. 'If it were really a religion, if Walter were truly a member of your Church, it would be very different. Under these circumstances, Hilda, as a Catholic, might regret that he should profess an alien creed, but she would not have the grief of feeling that he had practically no belief at all.'

'But are you sure this grieves her so much?'

'Too sure! The poor child's letters to her mother and myself contain nothing but expressions of her earnest longing that her husband may be brought to

have some religious faith. She feels very bitterly the fact of being unable to discuss such things with him without exciting his suspicions that she is aiming at converting him to her Church.'

'If Hilda had ever talked to me about Walter, it would be very much easier for me to try and give him a hint as to what was troubling her,' said Mrs. Russell.

'She naturally might not like to mention the subject to you,' replied Lady Merton. 'Of course, to her own family she feels she can do so, and that we, as Catholics, would be able to sympathize with her in her distress of mind.'

'Tell me what I can do, dear Lady Merton,' said Mary Russell warmly. 'I am afraid that neither I nor my husband have any influence over Walter. We are very good friends, but I suppose that we have tacitly agreed not to embark in religious questions, for the latter are never mentioned between us.'

Lady Merton considered for a few moments before replying.

'Well,' she answered at length, 'I think you have it in your power to do a good deal. I am not asking you to further Lord Redman's conversion to Catholicism. As I have already said, conversions are the work of God, not of individuals. Will you allow an old woman to be very frank with you, Mrs. Russell?'

'Please.'

'Be a friend to Hilda. One woman can do so much for another. Try to impress upon her that it is her duty to rouse her husband from the lamentable state of indifference towards all faith into which he has fallen. Even though she may never have spoken to you about

her feelings, she will listen more readily to you than she would to one of her own family. You would supply, so to speak, a neutral ground, upon which she and Walter could meet—a channel through which they could communicate without fear of being misunderstood by one another.'

'But Hilda might very naturally resent any such interference on my part. As I say, she has given me no encouragement to offer her my advice or my sympathy. She might ask what had led me to suppose that she needed them, and I could hardly tell her that I was acting upon your suggestion.'

'Certainly not!' replied Lady Merton hastily. 'You must never let her know that I have spoken to you on the subject. Let her think that anything you say to her is prompted by your own sympathy with her in a very trying position. After all, you told me just now that you often wondered she did not feel her husband's spiritual state more keenly. Why should you not let her see that her apparent indifference to it surprises and distresses you?'

'Well,' said Mrs. Russell, 'I will try. Heaven knows, both James and I would be thankful to think that Walter had some belief, which, you say, is Hilda's one anxiety. She does not make a point of that belief being in all respects the same as her own?'

'By no means,' replied Lady Merton. 'If you can bring them both to feel that, even though the forms of their faith may differ, a common basis of belief unites them, you will have done a great work. Their present state of existence is deplorable, and you cannot imagine how deeply poor Hilda feels it; for, from what you tell me, she has contrived to conceal her unhappiness

from you. Think over it, I entreat you, my dear Mrs. Russell, and help us if you can; but, above all things, never let either Hilda or her husband know that you are acting on any suggestion from me. I am sure that you quite understand how fatal it would be to our hopes should they suspect such a thing.'

'You may rely upon me not to do that,' answered Mary Russell. 'It is very odd,' she continued, 'but do you know, I always had quite a different idea of you Roman Catholics. I believed that you "compassed heaven and earth to make one proselyte"; but, since I have talked to Hilda and you on these subjects, I begin to see that you look at the spirit of belief, not merely at its external forms.'

Lady Merton's eyes drooped.

'Yes,' she said, 'you are right: we look to the spirit. The power of directing that spirit into its true home is in other hands than ours. Is your husband, the Rector, also interested in these things?' she added suddenly.

Mrs. Russell smiled.

'James is a High Churchman,' she replied; 'but nothing extreme, and he is devotedly attached to his Church.'

'Ah! very anti-Catholic, I suppose?'

'Anti-Roman,' said Mrs. Russell.

Lady Merton laughed.

'Ah well, my dear,' she said, 'you will learn to appreciate us better some day; at least, I don't know about your husband, but I am sure that you will do so. You will find that we are not such very silly people after all. Shall we go back to the ball-room? I suppose you ought to return to your duties, and I shall

go and look for Hilda, to wish her good-night. It is time for old women like me to be in bed.'

Dancing was going on with renewed vigour when Lady Merton and Mary Russell returned to the Barons' Hall. A plentiful supper had caused the last remnants of shyness to disappear from among the guests, and even the frigid exclusiveness of the upper servants had thawed under the influence of roast beef and turkeys, haunches of venison and a reckless mixture of port, sherry, and old ale. Lord Redman's champagne had been contemptuously declined by the majority of his tenants as 'nowt but gas, which blows a man out and spoils his appetite.'

Walter himself, after dancing with the wives of his principal tenants and the ladies of the magnates of Trentford, and mingling among the company saying a cheery word to everyone, had retired from the scene, and his example had been followed by the majority of those staying in the house. Lady Redman, however, and a few of the younger members of the party had remained, and Lady Merton and Mrs. Russell found her dancing the Highland schottische with the Trentford doctor. As they made their way towards her, many flattering and kindly remarks passed upon her by those who were watching the dancers fell upon their ears.

'If all Papists be like my lady there,' one old dame said to her companion as Hilda and her partner passed them, 'they can't be such a good-for-nothing lot after all.'

'Eh, deary me, Mrs. Lyons, but isn't it downright awful to think of a real lady like she a-worshipping of graven images, for all the world like them heathens in foreign parts!'

'They do say,' replied the first speaker in a hoarse whisper, 'as how all the children, if so be as there is any, must be reared Papists, same as their mother.'

'Well, well! They've queer ways, has the quality.'

Mrs. Russell laughed with some embarrassment. She and Lady Merton were standing behind the two women, who had not noticed their proximity.

'You see,' she said, 'Abbotsbury has its own way of looking at things.'

'So sad!' murmured Lady Merton; 'and to think,' she added, 'that the forefathers of these people were Catholics, and that the poor things should be so ignorant of the Faith of which they have been robbed.'

At this moment Lady Gwendolen came towards them.

'Why, mamma,' she said to her mother, 'I thought you had gone to bed.'

'I am on my way there,' answered Lady Merton. 'I am just going to say good-night to Hilda, and then I will come. You are not going to stay any longer, I suppose, Gwen?'

'Oh no. I believe they will keep the ball up till five o'clock.'

Lady Gwendolen accompanied her mother upstairs, and stayed for a few minutes in her sitting-room.

'You must unfasten my gown at the back, Gwen,' said Lady Merton. 'I can't get at it, and I told Spencer I shouldn't want her.'

'Where have you been for the last half-hour?' asked Lady Gwendolen, struggling with a knot.

'In the gallery, talking to Mrs. Russell. What do you think of her?'

'I don't know that I have thought much about her.

She seems a nice woman, but I never know what to talk about to clergymen's wives. Hilda likes her very much, I believe.'

'Yes, it is very lucky that she does. Do you know, Gwen,' added Lady Merton, 'I think that she is very much interested in the Church.'

'Really?' said Lady Gwendolen a little indifferently.

She had suffered in her time from her mother's converts. Lady Merton had a way of handing them over to the Cawardens after conversion, to be introduced into Catholic society.

'I am sure of it,' continued Lady Merton, taking off her diamonds. 'We had quite a long conversation together.'

'You must tell Hilda,' said Lady Gwendolen, 'she will be able to help her, if she really has any leanings towards the Church.'

'No, Gwen; Hilda must know nothing about it. Her doing so might interfere with a little plan of mine,' replied Lady Merton.

'But surely she is the very person who ought to be told. She could do so much.'

'She ought to have plenty to do in trying to bring about her husband's conversion, without undertaking anybody else's,' Lady Merton answered decidedly. 'I mean Mrs. Russell to be of use. Really, Hilda is too ridiculously in love. Cannot you see, Gwen, that she is sacrificing everything to the desire to keep up a kind of perpetual honeymoon? I am glad to perceive that our remonstrances have had the effect of making her uneasy, but the thought that someone outside her own family, and a Protestant, was scandalized at her quiet acceptance of her husband's agnosticism would make

far more impression upon her than any objections of ours.'

Lady Gwendolen looked puzzled.

'I don't see what use Mrs. Russell could be,' she said.

'Perhaps not, but I do,' replied Lady Merton a little irritably. 'I have much more experience in these things than you have, Gwen. It is owing to me that your daughter is Lady Redman. If I had not taken the matter in hand, Redman would have gone off in a huff, and you would have married Hilda to one of your tiresome young men with good names and second-rate manners whom I always meet at Cawarden. I dare say they would have said the rosary together before they went to bed, and would have driven in the wagonette to Mass on Sundays, but nothing more would have come of it in this world.'

'In this world, no.'

'My dear Gwen,' said Lady Merton, 'I really think that you are a little short-sighted in the way you regard things. We have to get through this world before we can get into the next. If you owe it to me that Hilda is the wife of a rich peer with a magnificent property, instead of being the partner in the joys of one of your Lancashire squireens, you will equally owe it to me that her husband is eventually brought into the Church. I need hardly remind you that the gain to our cause in England will be rather greater in this case than it would have been had Hilda married one of your Catholic young men and sunk into respectable insignificance.'

Lady Gwendolen was silenced, as, indeed, she had been all her life when her mother reasoned with her on questions of expediency.

'But you have not told me what Mrs. Russell is to do,' she said presently.

'Mrs. Russell,' replied Lady Merton, 'can be utilized in two ways. She can assist us in wakening Hilda to a sense of her responsibilities towards her husband's soul and of her duties towards the Church; and she can also, by reason of her position here, point out to Walter Redman that his attitude towards religion is a source of pain and trouble to his wife.'

'But I don't believe that it is, mamma,' exclaimed Lady Gwendolen, 'and neither do you!'

Lady Merton looked compassionately at her daughter. The Duchess of Wearmouth had been much more amenable to reason.

'I have told Mrs. Russell that it is,' she answered, 'and she will tell her cousin so.'

'And she will equally tell Hilda what she has learned from you,' said Lady Gwendolen.

Lady Merton smiled indulgently.

'Oh no, my dear,' she replied, 'she will not. I had foreseen that contingency. Leave the management of this affair to me, Gwen. Hilda must be made to understand that the time for dreaming is over, and that the moment for action has arrived. She and Walter have been married five months,' Lady Merton added significantly. 'We may reasonably suppose that in a few more there will be some result of the marriage.'

'No doubt,' said Lady Gwendolen; 'but what has that to do with Walter's attitude to religion and Hilda's apparent carelessness?'

'Everything. Do you recollect Father Galsworthy's reason for objecting to Walter's indifference to the conditions imposed by the Church?'

'Perfectly.'

'Father Galsworthy was quite right. Supposing Hilda has a son, Walter will begin to feel that those conditions are more important than he imagined when he so readily agreed to them. If he is under the impression that Hilda is indifferent to the fact of his not being a Catholic, the temptation to break his promises with regard to the bringing up of the son who is to succeed him will be very strong. He would not be the first Protestant who has made a mixed marriage, and broken his word when brought face to face with the necessity of seeing his children educated as Catholics.'

Lady Gwendolen looked troubled.

'Ah!' she replied; 'I begin to see what you mean. But Mrs. Russell will not be likely to use her influence on the side of our religion. Why should she?'

'She may be made to do so unconsciously,' said Lady Merton. 'How often do we not see the interests of the Church furthered by those who, unknown to themselves, are the agents of God's will? In Mrs. Russell's case, however, I have great hopes that the part which she is called upon to play at Abbotsbury may ultimately lead to her own conversion. At all events, my dear Gwen, leave things to me, and say nothing to Hilda of what I have told you. It is very important that both she and Walter should be able to regard Mrs. Russell as quite independent in her views. Mrs. Russell is fond of Hilda, and, of course, she is Walter's cousin. She may prove a great help to us, and save her own soul into the bargain by being so; for, after all, she will be serving the Church. She is a person I shall not lose sight of,' concluded Lady Merton, as she kissed her daughter and bade her good-

night. 'I shall try and get her to come to Ware for a few days. A Catholic atmosphere has a marvellous effect upon a dissatisfied soul. All the same, it would not be advisable that she should be converted just yet.' And she picked up her diamonds, which she had laid upon a table, and retired into her bedroom, as Lady Gwendolen left her and went to her own apartment.

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CHAPTER VIII

EARLY in April Lord and Lady Redman went to London, and took up their abode at the family residence in St. James's Square. Lady Merton's prognostications seemed as though they would shortly be fulfilled, for Hilda's confinement was expected to take place before the close of the spring. During the weeks which had elapsed between Christmas and Easter, Hilda and her husband had remained quietly at home. The latter found plenty of occupation in the affairs of the property, and in hunting with the Meynell hounds, in the heart of whose 'country' Abbotsbury was situated. Occasionally a few people had come and stayed with them, but since the large gathering which had filled the house at Christmas-time, Hilda had seemed to be disinclined to receive many guests. Walter Redman noticed with some concern that the preoccupied and worried air which he had first observed in his wife after the arrival of her own relatives at Abbotsbury did not disappear when they had departed, as he had hoped would be the case. Indeed, as the days went by, it seemed to increase, and her spirits were no longer so elastic and buoyant as they had been during the first months of her married life.

Under any other circumstances Walter might have consoled himself with the reflection that the state of

his wife's health was answerable for the change which he could not but observe in her temperament. It was not that she was less affectionate than before; and the sweetness of disposition which was one of her charms, and which attracted even those who were brought into contact with her for the first time, never deserted her. A casual observer, and even, perhaps, an intimate acquaintance, would not have noticed the change; but Lord Redman adored his wife, and the eyes of love are not to be deceived. Mindful of Mr. Shirley's counsel, and faithful to his determination to test its efficacy, Walter forebore to question Hilda as to what might be troubling her. He affected to be unaware of the change in her, though all the time he had no doubt as to the causes which were contributing to it, and his feelings towards those whom he fully believed to be responsible for it were the reverse of charitable.

He was glad to see that the society of his cousin Mary Russell was evidently a pleasure to Hilda. The two were a great deal together, and Walter reflected that it was very natural that they should be so. It was rather dreary, he thought, for his wife to have no female society in a big house like Abbotsbury, and it was very lucky that Mrs. Russell should be close by, and that they should be such good friends.

Walter often wished that Hilda would speak to him of what was troubling her, but this she never did; and though it would have been a relief to him had she broken through her reserve, he honoured her the more for not doing so, knowing the motive which prompted her silence.

It had not escaped Lord Redman's observation that his wife went much more often to the monastery church

at Abbotsbridge than she had formerly done. Hitherto Hilda had contented herself with going to Mass on the prescribed days, and occasionally to Vespers and Benediction on Sunday afternoons. Now, however, her husband frequently heard her ordering a carriage overnight to take her to Abbotsbridge early the following morning, and she would return as he was finishing his breakfast, and tell him she had been to church. He knew that Lent had commenced, and concluded that this fact would account for her increased attendance to her religious devotions, but it seemed to him that her preoccupation of mind, and the worried expression on her face, were more noticeable on these days than they were at other times. As the weeks went by, he wondered whether these early morning excursions to Abbotsbridge were not an imprudence on her part in her then condition, but he did not expostulate with her on the subject.

Easter fell early that year, and as the last days of Lent approached it became very evident to Walter that his fears lest Hilda should over-fatigue herself were far from being groundless. She looked pale, and at times unwell, and he noticed, moreover, that she was very strict in her observance of eating *maigre* on the days when meat was forbidden by the Church, and thought she should be dispensed from doing so.

Finally, he determined to confide his fears to Mary Russell, and to ask her if she could not urge Hilda to be more careful of herself. Any remarks on the subject, he felt, would come much better from Mrs. Russell than from him, and Hilda could not think that they were made with any view of interfering with that full liberty to practise her religion which he had promised she should always enjoy.

Full of his plan of taking Mary Russell into his confidence, Walter had walked across to the Rectory one morning when his wife had gone to her church, and had found his cousin in her garden, discussing with the gardener as to the grouping of the colours in the flower-beds for the coming season.

'I want to talk to you about Hilda, Mary,' he said, as they walked up and down the terrace together. 'I do not feel quite satisfied about her.'

Mrs. Russell looked at him curiously.

'In what way?' she asked.

'Well, I can hardly say,' he replied. 'I have thought of late that she has not been in her usual good spirits. No doubt,' he added a little constrainedly, 'it can easily be accounted for, and that is my reason for coming to you about it. I suspect that it is more a matter for a woman's interference than a man's.'

'I do not know, Walter. I am not sure,' began his cousin hesitatingly.

'I thought, perhaps, that you could say a word to her, and beg her not to overtire herself by going so perpetually to her church as she has been doing lately. I am sure that going off to Abbotsbridge before breakfast cannot be good for her in her present condition. She would listen to you more readily than to me.'

'I do not see why she should do so,' replied Mary Russell.

'Oh, well, it is a little awkward for me to say anything to her,' said Walter. 'You see, she might think I wished to interfere with her devotions. Coming from you, she could not feel that. Have you noticed that she has not been looking well of late?' he added.

Mrs. Russell paused for a moment before replying.

'Yes,' she said at length, 'I have. But, Walter, I don't think that it is caused by any bodily ailment.'

'What else should cause it?'

'I am afraid that she is troubled in her mind.'

'My dear Mary! what can she have to trouble her mind?'

'You.'

Lord Redman looked at her.

'Will you explain?' he said briefly.

'I have always been wanting to tell you,' answered Mrs. Russell quickly. 'I wonder you have not guessed at the cause of it before. Hilda is fretting about you, Walter. She cannot bear the thought that you have no religious belief. I know it has always troubled her greatly, but it is natural that just now, in her present state, the thought should distress her more than ever.'

'Has she told you so?'

Mrs. Russell turned aside and arranged a straggling branch of japonica, the red blossoms of which were just coming into bloom.

'Yes,' she replied.

Walter Redman was silent.

'It is very natural,' repeated his cousin. 'You should put yourself in her place, Walter. Remember all that religious faith means to her. We may think that Roman Catholics are in error, but we cannot deny that their faith is a very real thing to them.'

'No one interferes with her faith.'

Mary Russell made a little movement of impatience.

'That is a regular man's remark,' she said. 'We women do not look upon our religion only as a matter of personal advantage to ourselves; we want those who

are near and dear to us to benefit by it also. It is that which is distressing your wife. She is full of fear for the future.'

'Let us put it plainly,' said Walter. 'She believes that she will go to heaven, and that I shall go to hell.'

Mrs. Russell looked shocked.

'It is too serious a subject for flippancy,' she said stiffly.

'I do not intend any flippancy; it is a plain statement of facts.'

'Well,' replied Mrs. Russell, 'I suppose that it is; but, being so, can you wonder if she is unhappy? It is not so much the thought of your being of another faith which grieves her, as that you have no belief in the form of religion which you nominally profess. Hilda does not want to convert you to Catholicism, but she does want to feel that you and she have a common faith in Christianity.'

Lord Redman looked at his cousin somewhat searchingly.

'Has she said as much to you?' he asked.

'No, she has never said so in words, but I am quite sure it is the case. Of course, I do not pretend to believe that she could ever be thoroughly happy so long as you were outside that which she naturally believes to be the only true Church. I understand that, when you married, you pledged yourselves to respect your mutual religions.'

'That is true.'

'But you have no religion, Walter; and, therefore, Hilda is left with nothing to respect so far as that pledge is concerned, and everything to fear for you. The certainty of this has gradually been growing in her

mind, and now it is beginning to tell upon her spirits, and perhaps upon her health.'

'But what would you have me do? I do not suppose that you, of all people, would suggest that I should turn Catholic in order to allay fears which I regard as resulting from a deplorable misconception of the nature of the Almighty!'

Mary Russell shook her head.

'No,' she replied, 'not unless you were convinced of the truth of Roman Catholicism. If you were so, I should say that it would be the best thing you could do. You must recollect that you practically severed your connection with the Church of your forefathers when you married. Your descendants must be Roman Catholics, so it would only be anticipating matters, so far as Abbotsbury is concerned, if you were one yourself.'

Walter Redman looked at her with surprise. Before his marriage he had often heard his cousin speak of converts to Rome in the terms of the strongest disapproval, not to say contempt. The thought of how the news of his engagement to a Catholic would be received at the Rectory had troubled him not a little at the time, for he had been afraid lest the prejudices of Mrs. Russell might have their effect upon the people of the place, to his wife's disadvantage. He could only conclude that her friendship with Hilda had caused her to take a more liberal-minded view of Roman Catholicism generally, but he had certainly not expected to hear her discussing the possibility of his embracing it with so much equanimity.

'Why, Mary,' he could not help saying to her, 'you surely have modified your opinions of late?'

'I am sorry for Hilda,' Mrs Russell replied, ignoring the question. 'I do not think you realize how great a trial it must be to her to see you in what her conscience tells her is a very deplorable state, and what her Church teaches her is a very perilous one. She is not a person who is indifferent to such things, and I know that she thinks deeply on these matters. It must be inexpressibly painful to her to have to keep silence about them in order not to appear faithless to a promise made to you before marriage.'

They walked on for a few minutes without speaking. Walter could not help being struck by the similarity between Mary Russell's words and those which Mr. Shirley had spoken. He did not feel the slightest doubt that his wife had confided her troubles to Mrs. Russell, and that the latter's remarks were the direct result of this confidence.

'The promise was a mutual one, made with the object of preventing any of those disagreeables which religious opinions are so apt to produce in life,' Lord Redman said, a little satirically. 'The arrangement seemed to answer very well during the first months of our marriage,' he added, 'and I cannot understand why Hilda should suddenly have become so sensitive on the subject, unless, of course, some external influences are at work upon her. I have, unfortunately, strong reason to believe that this is the case, and that if, as you say, Hilda is worrying herself, the fact is chiefly owing to interference on the part of some of her family.'

Mrs. Russell shook her head decidedly.

'No, Walter,' she replied. 'I am convinced that you are wrong there. I feel sure that it is no external influence which is at work upon your wife, but some-

thing far more powerful—namely, the internal promptings of her conscience, supported by the traditional teaching of her Church.'

Here Mary Russell spoke what she genuinely believed to be the truth.

'I must say,' she continued, 'I think Hilda is wonderfully broad-minded, considering the school in which she has been brought up. You jump to the conclusion that nothing short of your embracing her faith would satisfy her. I believe, as I have said before, that she would be content with the knowledge that you accepted the religion of your predecessors.'

'It is all the more fortunate for her that I do not do so.'

'I do not see why.'

'For a very simple reason. If I were a man with decided opinions on those subjects, do you suppose that it would be a pleasant thing to see myself forced to give way to the arrogant claims of my wife's Church, and to allow my children to be brought up in another creed to my own? You know very well, Mary, what the traditions of our family are. You have only got to look round the walls of the church yonder to be reminded of them.'

'Yes,' replied Mrs. Russell, 'but remember that the traditions you allude to are comparatively modern ones in the family history. What would Sir Walter have thought of them, and of your ideas?'

'I could argue that point with you also,' said Lord Redman, smiling. 'Even in pre-Reformation days the Redmans were always loyal Englishmen first and Catholics afterwards, and they were among the earliest to reject the claims of Rome. It seems,' he added,

a little bitterly, 'that it has been reserved for their latest representative to submit to the latter.'

Mary Russell glanced at him inquiringly. It was the first remark which she had ever heard him make which could have led her to suppose that he had any feeling for the religious traditions of his house in the past.

'However,' he continued, 'I did not come here to talk about myself and my ideas, but about Hilda. Do you not think you could try and persuade her not to trouble herself unnecessarily about all these things? I am sure that it is very bad for her just now to do so.'

'She does not regard it as unnecessary, you see,' said Mrs. Russell.

'Well,' exclaimed Walter, in a tone of mingled amusement and impatience, 'I'll be hanged if I can make you religious people out! You set up a deity, and no sooner have you done so than you treat him as though he were an absolute fool, and incapable of managing his own affairs. At any rate, Mary,' he added, 'you might advise her, as you say she talks to you, to leave things in the hands of Providence, at all events for the present. I notice that people generally take that course when they don't choose to be troubled. And if you could give her a hint not to let Lady Merton and the priests worry her, it would be a good thing. You could point out to her that she was much happier before she began to allow all these ideas to disturb her; and for that matter, you might tell her that I was much happier also. Perhaps, if she thought that, she might not trouble herself so much about me.'

'Well, Walter, I will see what I can do,' replied

Mrs. Russell; 'but remember I think that it is perfectly natural that Hilda should distress herself. The remedy lies in your own hands. She may very reasonably consider that if you really cared for her you would make some effort to overcome your scepticism when you know that it is this, and this alone, which is troubling her.'

'Do you think she could really suppose such a thing?' asked Walter.

The idea had not struck him before, and it seemed to add a fresh complication to his position.

'She might very easily do so—in fact, I have little doubt that this thought is adding to her trouble. After all, it must be mortifying to her to feel that you are surrounded by agnostics, such as Mr. Shirley, for instance, whose views you are always ready to accept, and to whom you can talk freely on all these questions, whereas to her your lips are sealed. You give her no reason to suppose that you are otherwise than indifferent to her peace of mind. You see, I speak plainly,' added Mrs. Russell, 'as you have asked me for my opinion.'

'Yes,' said Walter thoughtfully, 'you certainly do, and I might believe that you were right if it were not for one point upon which I am not quite clear.'

'And that is?'

'As to how much of Hilda's distress of mind is spontaneous and how much is the result of suggestion. You know as well as I do, Mary, how many subtile influences can be brought to bear upon a Catholic who is devoted to his or her religion, and your sex is generally supposed to be the more open to such influences of the two.'

'We are always told so, but those things are often very much exaggerated. Unscrupulous people in any creed can abuse the religious devotion of others. In this case, however, I cannot see any grounds for such a suspicion.'

'Perhaps not,' said Walter, 'but it is a curious coincidence that Hilda's frequent visits to Abbotsbridge seem to have the effect, not of tranquillizing her mind, but apparently of still further disturbing it. I have noticed that she is invariably in lower spirits and looks more worried after them, and I often wonder what is said to her there. I never ask her any questions, but I conclude that she has some special spiritual adviser among the monks.'

'Yes,' replied Mary Russell, 'she has. She told me that one of the Fathers at Abbotsbridge had been particularly recommended to her by an Oratorian priest in London who is very intimate with her family.'

'Ah! Father Galsworthy probably.'

'I think that was the name she said. Of course it is quite natural that she should have a confessor here, and doubtless she consults him upon her difficulties.'

'Of course!'

Lord Redman did not add any more, but the tone of his voice expressed his thoughts eloquently enough.

Turning at the end of the terrace, they saw the Rector approaching them from the house. He had seen them from his study windows, and wondered what Lord Redman had come to talk about. As they were evidently in earnest conversation, he had refrained from joining them sooner.

'Well, Mary,' said Walter, as he drew near, 'I hope you will do your best to prevent Hilda from dwelling too much upon her thoughts, whether they are her own or other people's. It is evident that they are doing her no good, and if things are as I cannot help suspecting, it will surely not be an objectionable task to you to try and counteract influences which could only succeed in making us both unhappy. Your Protestant principles ought to support you in so good a work,' he added, smiling.

'I should not like to say anything which might appear as though I were seeking to destroy Hilda's faith in her Church,' said Mrs. Russell.

'Neither should I wish you to do so. All that I would ask of you is to help her to protect herself against those who may be seeking to abuse her faith and employ it as a means to securing their own ends. Ah! Russell, good-morning. Mary and I have been having a little talk about my wife's health. We are off to London, you know, very soon. Great nonsense, I call it, leaving the country just as spring has come; but we are slaves to fashion——'

'And to doctors,' said the Rector, with a smile.

'Oh yes, of course! I forgot. Doctors, certainly; though I've no doubt that Turnbull of Trentford would do just as well as Siddons of Belgravia, and charge a good deal less for doing it.'

After talking a little while with the Russells, Walter had gone back to the Hall. As he passed through the churchyard something prompted him to look into the old building itself. He opened the heavy oaken door gently and entered. The church was empty, and he went through the nave and down the steps into the

chancel. Here he paused and looked around him. The March sunlight was streaming through the windows, some of which were open, and the voices of the spring —the liquid notes of blackbirds and thrushes, the bleating of the young lambs in the meadows, the cawing of the nesting rooks—floated in with it, the eternal song of Life, unhushed by the presence of the dead. Walter Redman leaned against the carved oaken pillars of the chancel stalls in which so many generations had worshipped and prayed. His glance rested on one after another of the monuments of his race, from that of Sir Walter de Redman, staring up at his armour on the wall above him as though wondering, as some irreverent descendant had said, how he should ever get into it again, to that of his own father, which he himself had erected a few years previously. He had been familiar with the scene all his life, but none the less he was conscious of a little thrill of pride as he looked upon it—of pride and of some sadness. There were not many such resting-places of a race which could point to an unbroken descent and ownership of the soil on which it lived of well-nigh a thousand years. The words which his cousin Mary Russell had spoken to him that morning returned to his mind. 'You practically severed your connection with the Church of your forefathers when you married,' she had told him. It was true. He had also severed the unborn who, in the ordinary course of nature would come after him, from all spiritual connection with those others who were lying around him and beneath his feet.

Walter Redman was too well versed in history and in the records of his own family for the thought that his heirs would revert to the primitive faith of their

ancestors to afford him much satisfaction. The fact remained that, however faithful the earlier members of the race might have been to their medieval beliefs, their immediate descendants had flung these aside so soon as education and enlightenment had enabled them to understand their true value, scope, and origin, in the same way that the nation at large had done. And now he had severed the connection of those who would succeed to them and to him with that national faith, the inheritance of a purer age, with which were bound up some of the best traditions of their common house.

'By what right?'

Walter Redman started and half turned round. It seemed to him as though the words were spoken aloud by some person standing at his side.

Then he remembered that he was alone, and knew that they were his own thoughts.

'By what right?' he repeated to himself, and had to reply that it was by right of his own indifference—his inability to believe.

In the silence of the church, with only himself and the dead to hear it, the answer did not sound satisfactory. It was strange, he thought, that it should not. He had analyzed that same indifference and inability to believe so deeply and so often, even there in that very place, while the offices of the Church were being celebrated around him, and the result of the analysis had never struck him as unsatisfactory until that moment.

Turning away almost impatiently, Walter retraced his steps to the west door of the church, and, opening it, found himself confronted by his wife, who was apparently about to enter it.

Hilda started when she saw him, and looked surprised.

'Why, Walter,' she said, 'I had no idea you were here.'

'I have been at the Rectory,' he replied, 'and just looked into the church on my way home. Do you want to go in?' he added. 'I will come back with you if you do.'

'Oh no,' said Hilda a little hurriedly. 'I thought I would go in for a minute or two; but it doesn't matter. Let us go into the gardens instead; it is such a lovely spring morning.'

'You have been to Abbotsbridge?'

'Yes; I have just got back.'

Walter looked at her.

'Don't you think you are doing a little too much?' he said.

'I? Oh, no! Why should you think that?'

'For no particular reason,' answered Walter lightly; 'only I have thought you sometimes looked tired of late, and that is not very wise of you,' he added, with a smile.

Hilda was silent. She was, indeed, feeling very tired, and she had walked through the gardens to the church, meaning to sit down in the latter in order to rest and think for a little while. She knew that she should, in all probability, find the building empty at that hour, and that nobody would be likely to disturb her, unless it were Mary Russell, who might come with fresh flowers for the altar. She had been considerably astonished at meeting her husband coming out of the church, and could not help wondering what had taken him there.

That morning she had had a long conversation with the Dominican Father to whom Father Galsworthy had advised her to go for spiritual counsel while she was at Abbotsbridge. As had been the case after all the interviews which she had recently had with him, she had returned from it more troubled and perplexed in her mind than ever. It was in vain that she tried to explain to the Dominican her perplexity. He either could not, or would not, understand it in the sense in which she attempted to present it to him. Father Vincent insisted upon looking at her case from a point of view which, though a logical one, Hilda felt in her heart not to be a true one, or only to be so in part. Carnal affection, he never ceased to assure his penitent, was at the bottom of her doubts and difficulties, and she was allowing her material love for her husband to cast out and destroy that spiritual love which alone could bring happiness and peace of mind to both of them in the future. The troubled state in which she found herself was, he impressed upon her, the Divine voice of conscience calling to her and urging her to do her duty towards God and His Church by putting aside all considerations of worldly love—by thinking, as he had implied to her with some frankness, more of her husband's soul and less of his body.

It was in vain that Hilda pleaded her scruples at breaking the promise which she had made never to interfere with her husband's religious views, and that she dreaded to disturb his evident happiness. Father Vincent had refused to listen for a moment to such objections. They were mere excuses, he told her—plausible inventions of Satan to obscure her vision and cause her to stray from that path of duty and sacrifice

of all selfish motives which her conscience was so clearly telling her to follow. The point of honour which she advanced—the maintenance on her part of a compact to which her husband had shown himself punctually observant, was swept scornfully aside by her confessor.

The Church, he declared to her, recognised no promise as binding the maintenance of which was detrimental to a human soul. The true dishonour would be for a Catholic to keep such a promise had it been exacted. The responsibility for breaking it would rest, not with her, but with those who had caused her to give a pledge which was in itself a sin.

Hilda's condition of health had certainly contributed towards those mental anxieties which had been increased rather than diminished by her attempts to seek spiritual advice and consolation from Father Vincent. Her approaching confinement, moreover, had afforded the latter occasion to remind her that she was about to pass through a period of pain and danger. He besought her to make peace with her conscience before that time should arrive. He pointed out how terrible a thing it would be should she have to reproach herself with having allowed her husband's soul to perish for the want of any attempt on her part to save it; how bitter would be the discovery that her vaunted affection for him had been no true love, but only an earthly passion.

Weary in body, distressed and harassed in mind, Hilda's soul had sometimes risen up in revolt against what her heart told her was both unjust and tyrannical. Then would follow hours of reaction, in which she would upbraid herself for her distrust, her lack of

humility and discipline, and strive to convict herself of that purely material passion to which Father Vincent had more than hinted that she was a prey.

But it was not true. Something deep down in her heart, and far removed from the disturbing elements which ruffled the surface of life, assured her of this. She could not lay her finger upon the falseness and insincerity of the reasoning which was brought to bear upon her, but it was in vain that she tried to combat the intuition that both the one and the other lay concealed in the counsel which was given to her at Abbotsbridge.

That morning Hilda had found Father Vincent more uncompromising than ever, and, if possible, less sympathetic. The Dominican had relied a little too much upon the fact that he was dealing with a woman who had been bred and born a Catholic, and had therefore ventured to bring more pressure to bear upon his visitor than was quite advisable. He had miscalculated the strength of Lady Redman's affection for her husband, and miscalculated also the limits of her submissiveness to spiritual authority. Much to Father Vincent's astonishment, Hilda had given him to understand that she was by no means disposed to follow his directions and advice. The moment had been a trying one to the Dominican, and in attempting to redeem one psychological blunder he had fallen into another, and had drawn so vivid a picture of the evil which Lady Redman was bringing upon herself and her husband by her contumacy as to arouse both the suspicions and the temper of his penitent.

The result of that morning's interview had been that Hilda had gently but firmly told Father Vincent that

she should soon be in London, where she could consult Father Galsworthy, and that, therefore, she did not think she need ask him to receive her again.

It was while still upset in her mind by this interview and its termination that Hilda had unexpectedly met her husband in the porch of the church at Abbotsbury. A few days afterwards they moved up to London.

CHAPTER IX

CONTRARY to her usual custom, Lady Merton spent her Easter in London. As a rule, she made a point of going to Rome before the Holy Week, and remaining there until the middle or end of June. She regarded herself, indeed, as a kind of *chargé d'affaires* of the English Catholics during her residence in the Eternal City. The latter flocked to her to procure them tickets to witness the Papal functions, and recent converts of a certain class beheld in her the portal by which they hoped to enter into Roman society—not merely the Anglo-American world, but that more exclusive one in which they should make the acquaintance of Roman princes and princesses, and meet the higher dignitaries of the Church face to face.

This year, however, Lady Merton had reluctantly postponed her visit *ad limina*. She felt that her duties to the Church would be more worthily fulfilled by remaining in London—at least, until after her granddaughter, Lady Redman's, confinement. Since leaving Abbotsbury she had several times corresponded with Mary Russell. The latter had been a little surprised to learn through Lady Merton's letters that Hilda's epistles to her family more than ever expressed the unhappiness and distress of mind under which their writer was labouring. She thought it strange that

Hilda should be so reticent to her regarding her thoughts and feelings, and at the same time so ready to discuss them with others. To be sure, Lady Merton had, in a manner, warned her that this was the case, and her explanation of it had seemed to be a very natural one under the circumstances.

Mary Russell, however, felt a little hurt with her cousin's wife. Considering herself not only to be fulfilling Lady Merton's request that she should help Hilda in her difficulties, but also to be acting for Walter's spiritual benefit and ultimate happiness, she had endeavoured to make the former understand that she was aware of her anxieties and sympathized with her in them. The result had not been as satisfactory as she had hoped, and Hilda's reserve had only increased. Her advances had not been responded to in any way, and Lady Redman had displayed so marked a disinclination to discuss her husband's opinions, or her own views regarding them, that Mrs. Russell had felt snubbed, and had judged it to be more prudent not to make a second attempt to induce her to do so. She concluded that Lady Merton had been mistaken in thinking that Hilda would speak all the more freely to her because she was not a Catholic, and thought that it was probably for this very reason that she declined to take her into her confidence.

With Walter, however, it was different. He and Mary Russell had several conversations together after their first discussion in the Rectory garden. Having once made up his mind to consult his cousin in the matter, it seemed to be a relief to him to be able to talk about his wife. Mary Russell encouraged him to do so, thinking that in this at any rate she was render-

ing good service. If it occurred to her that Walter talked openly to her because he was under the impression that his wife did the same, she did not think it either necessary or wise to undeceive him. Lord Redman himself had no doubt that it was owing to his cousin's remonstrances that Hilda's visits to Abbotsbridge had been far less frequent during the fortnight or so which elapsed before their departure for London. He had congratulated Mrs. Russell on the successful results of her remonstrances, and on this point, again, she had considered it more prudent to allow him to think that she had earned his congratulations and had spoken to Hilda.

Lady Merton had been by no means pleased when she received Mrs. Russell's letter describing the failure of her endeavours to induce her grand-daughter to talk about her husband's spiritual shortcomings. It was obviously impossible that Mrs. Russell should be able to arouse Hilda to a sense of shame that even the Protestant wife of the clergyman of her husband's parish was astonished at her indifference to his irreligion, if she were not allowed to approach the question.

Lady Merton felt extremely provoked with Hilda for upsetting her plans, and she took the note to Lady Gwendolen, and made the latter read it in her presence to Father Galsworthy.

She was more annoyed than ever when, after he had listened to this letter, Father Galsworthy drew another from his pocket-book.

'I have a communication here,' he said, 'which, I think, throws some light upon this matter. It is from my friend Father Vincent, the sub-Prior of the monastery at Abbotsbridge. You made his acquaint-

ance, I think,' he added, 'when you were both at Abbotsbury last Christmas.'

'Yes,' said Lady Merton; 'Hilda took us over to the monastery church and introduced us to him.'

'He writes to me,' continued Father Galsworthy, 'that he is very much concerned at Lady Redman's frame of mind. I shall not be disclosing any sacred confidences if I read you a part of his letter. The details he gives me do not, I need hardly say, enter into matters which passed between him and Lady Redman under the seal of confession. They are merely his own comments on her general attitude towards her husband's unfortunate agnosticism—the result of impressions formed during conversations quite independent of the confessional.'

'Of course,' said Lady Merton.

'It will be sufficient, I think, if I read the following extract from his letter,' pursued Father Galsworthy: '"I deeply regret to say that I appear to have failed in my efforts to awaken Lady Redman to a proper sense of her duties as the Catholic wife of an infidel husband. An affection which seems to me to be essentially material and physical has, alas! obscured her powers of moral perception. My last conversation with Lady Redman on these matters was far from satisfactory, and she parted from me in a spirit which I can only qualify as rebellious. I learn from her that she is soon to be in London, and no doubt you will see her. I can only pray that your counsel may prevail, and that I may be forgiven by Almighty God for my inability to induce her to execute the task which He, in His mercy to one outside His Church, has so clearly assigned to her."'

his not properly understanding her nature, and the peculiar position in which she is placed.'

'I do not suppose that I should have succeeded where Father Vincent failed. I only venture to think that he may have been a little too hasty. So delicate a matter needs time and very gentle treatment. It should be the aim of Lady Redman's spiritual director to try and exercise that very gift to which I have just alluded. The material elements of the love she bears to her husband should be made use of, not trampled down and despised. They must by degrees be transformed from masters into servants. As the former, they are pernicious; as the latter, they may be rendered valuable. I do not know if I have explained myself,' he added.

'It appears to me to be a dangerous thing to interfere with a woman's love for her husband,' said Lady Gwendolen hesitatingly.

Lady Merton glanced at her reprovingly.

'Really, Gwen, I am surprised at you,' she said. 'Of course Father Galsworthy does not propose to do that; it would be monstrous. As I understand it, all that he would wish is that Hilda's eyes should be opened, and that she should distinguish between that true love for her husband which will be the happiness and the consolation both of her own life and of his, and the mere—er—human affection which at present dominates her. Am I not right, Father?'

'You are perfectly right, Lady Merton. As you know, I was always opposed to this marriage. I do not approve of Catholics marrying those professing heretical or schismatic creeds. The risk is too great, and I have seldom known such alliances not lead to undesirable complications. My advice, however, was

overruled. I am quite aware, of course, that you all consented to the marriage from the laudable desire that it should lead to the saving of a soul.'

'And to the extending of the influence of our holy religion in this country,' added Lady Merton.

'Precisely. We may reasonably hope that the latter object has been attained, or will very shortly be so, as far as the future is concerned. But we cannot be sure of it. Lord Redman is a young man. It must in all probability be many years before we can indeed say that Abbotsbury is in Catholic hands, and that another prominent English house has returned to the faith of its forefathers.'

Lady Merton nodded her head approvingly.

'Who can say,' continued Father Galsworthy, 'what the influence of a Protestant father—we will call Lord Redman for courtesy's sake a Protestant—may not effect upon a young man? In her solicitude for her children, the Church protects the offspring of such marriages, as far as she is able to do so, by the most wise stipulation that they shall be educated in her divine truths; but she cannot guard them against the baneful influences of the Protestantism of this country in their after-life. The dangers to which they are exposed are all the greater from the fact of one of their parents being a Protestant. For my part, I wish that the Church would disallow mixed marriages *in toto*. The restrictions which she has placed upon them in England of recent years are but half-measures. There should be no compromising with heretics.'

'Ah, yes! all you say is very true,' said Lady Merton. 'It would be better, no doubt, if mixed marriages were definitely forbidden. But, as they are not, it is clearly

his not properly understanding her nature, and the peculiar position in which she is placed.'

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'Ah, yes! all you say is very true,' said Lady Merton. 'It would be better, no doubt, if mixed marriages were definitely forbidden. But, as they are not, it is clearly

the duty of all Catholics to endeavour that when entered upon they should so far as possible advance the cause of the Church. I often wonder,' she added, with a sigh, 'what I should have done if all my children had been Catholics, and not you only, Gwen! Our choice, you see, is so limited—so very limited,' she concluded, thinking of the marriageable young men in the Catholic world.

Father Galsworthy thought that he knew very well what Lady Merton would have done, and so, it must be confessed, did Lady Gwendolen.

'I do not understand,' he said, 'what can have wrought such a change in Lady Redman's intentions. During her engagement she spoke enthusiastically of the joy it would be to her to be the means of bringing her future husband into the Church. I was surprised that she did not appear to realize his attitude towards Christianity generally.'

Lady Merton looked at him with a frank smile.

'Dear Father Galsworthy,' she said, 'you are so removed from the vanities of our world that I do not wonder you are surprised. I was so myself. Hilda deceived herself, and, quite unintentionally, poor dear child, she deceived us. You must remember that she was very much in love. Probably we are better able to make allowances for her in that matter than you could be.'

'She deceived you?' asked Father Galsworthy.

'Yes; quite unintentionally, as I have just said, but she deceived us—at least, she certainly did me; and I, of course, repeated to her mother what she had told me. From all she said, I quite thought she had good grounds for believing that Walter Redman was not so

sceptical as he gave himself out to be. Irreligion in young men is very often a *pose*. She appeared to be so certain of being able to influence him when once they were married, that I felt convinced we were very short-sighted in attempting to prevent the engagement. I am quite as much astonished as you are at her apparent indifference, and at her unwillingness to further her husband's conversion, as, indeed, I have told her very plainly.'

'And what did she say?'

'Well, she evidently took it to heart,' replied Lady Merton. 'There is no doubt that she had not realized the position at all. Mrs. Russell, whose letter you have just heard, tells me that, though Hilda will not speak to her about it, she is certainly very troubled in her mind, which is a good sign.'

'We must do our best to remove the cause of her trouble,' said Father Galsworthy.

'Ah!' exclaimed Lady Gwendolen. 'I am sure you will be able to help her better than anyone else could do. You have known Hilda from her childhood, Father, and I feel so thankful to think she will be under your direction again, now that she is coming to London. And with all that is before her, too!'

'I am very disappointed about Mrs. Russell,' said Lady Merton, 'for I had hoped that she would have been able to do so much with Hilda. However, she appears to have had several conversations with Walter Redman, and from what she has written to me lately I think she has been very discreet. She has allowed him to think that his wife is confiding in her, and this, of course, gives greater weight to all that she says to him.'

'Mrs. Russell is likely to join the Church, you say?' asked Father Galsworthy.

Lady Merton smiled.

'She is one of those people who have had violent prejudices,' she replied, 'and is now in a state of bewilderment because many of them have been exploded.'

'It is always a good thing when the wives of the Protestant clergy become converts,' said Father Galsworthy; 'it brings the claims of the Church home to their husbands' parishioners, and puts the husbands themselves in a very false position.'

'I mean to take her in hand,' said Lady Merton. 'She has promised to pay me a visit at Ware this summer. It certainly would be a great thing if we could open her eyes to the truth, and, of course, the more the Faith is propagated at Abbotsbury the better. There is so much in gradually accustoming people to an idea, especially in a country place where old traditions have to be overcome.'

'But is there not a fear,' said Father Galsworthy, 'that this lady may only succeed in attaching Lord Redman more to Protestantism? He will naturally conclude that she is talking to him in the interests of that religion.'

'I think not,' replied Lady Merton. 'He is very much in love with his wife, and you must remember that he will always believe that it is she who is prompting Mrs. Russell.'

'But even so——' began the Oratorian.

Lady Merton interrupted him.

'I see what you are afraid of,' she said, smiling. 'Mrs. Russell herself is quite satisfied that no one is

aiming at Lord Redman's conversion to Catholicism. She believes she is acting in the interests of her own Church, and that Hilda merely desires that her husband should have some religious faith. She has no idea that she is fulfilling the part of a stepping-stone.'

'But is not that policy rather dangerous?'

'Something must be risked in such a cause, Father!' replied Lady Merton, looking at him from beneath drooping eyelids. 'Mrs. Russell is not a very far-seeing person, I think,' she continued. 'She will play the part all the better because she is so unconscious of having assumed it. If Walter Redman is to be converted at all, he must be made to think about religion. Protestantism will be as good as any other form to begin with.'

'But he might never get any further!'

'I am convinced that he would. Once he could be made to believe in something, his love for Hilda, and hers for him, would lead him on. Besides, there will be the child—that ought to prove a great bond of union.'

'Father Vincent says that Lady Redman has scruples of conscience—or what she believes to be scruples of conscience—about breaking a certain promise which it appears she made to her husband at the time of their marriage,' said Father Galsworthy.

'Oh,' replied Lady Merton, 'a very ridiculous thing! Hilda was extremely foolish to agree to it; but then, a young girl in love is hardly to be held responsible for all that she may say. She told me about it at the time, and of course I advised her not to commit herself in any way. It seems, however, that she allowed her *fiancé* to extract a promise from her that she would never

attempt to interfere with his religious opinions. She alluded to this piece of folly at Abbotsbury, and I explained to her that such a promise could not be binding. Besides, Walter Redman has no religious opinions—they are all anti-religious; so, under any circumstances, it could not hold good.'

'No such promise could hold good for a Catholic,' said Father Galsworthy in his abrupt voice.

'So I told her. I pointed out to her that she must have made it with a certain mental reservation, for she was determined to effect her husband's conversion. I cannot think why it should appear to her to be so serious a matter.'

'Let us hope she will look at it in a different light before long,' said Father Galsworthy. 'We must be patient,' he continued, 'and not try to hurry things unduly. I am afraid that this has been Father Vincent's mistake. The birth of her child will probably work a great change in Lady Redman's mind, and she will be likely to listen more readily to advice. Once she is a mother, the future will mean much more to her. It must be our task to make her realize how grave a responsibility lies with her, especially if the child should be a son.'

'And my son-in-law must be thrown more with Catholics, if possible,' said Lady Gwendolen. 'He must be taken out of a Protestant atmosphere. Look what an influence Hilda's society has already had upon Mrs. Russell. I am convinced that had it not been for this absurd promise between them, and Hilda's folly in observing it so strictly, she would have had quite as much influence over her husband, or more.'

'No doubt,' said Father Galsworthy. 'I agree with

you, Lady Gwendolen: it is most desirable that Lord Redman should be brought under the influence of Catholicism, and learn to know the everyday life of those who, like yourselves, are faithful children of the Church. And now,' he added, 'I must leave you. I think that these letters have shown us exactly where we stand, and what we shall have to do in order to help Lady Redman, and, we will hope, with God's blessing, Lord Redman's soul. They will be here in a few days, I conclude, and, of course, I shall go and call on her. If there is anything more that I can do, you will let me know, will you not?' he concluded, turning to Lady Merton.

'Dear Father Galsworthy,' the latter replied, 'you are of such help and comfort to us in our anxieties! No, I think there is nothing more to be said for the present. Stay,' she murmured; 'there is one thing. Before you leave us, Father, will you not say a Hail Mary and Our Father with us, and let us offer them to St. Joseph together, and implore his aid in our efforts to advance the cause of the Church of which he is patron?'

Lady Merton sank on her knees as she spoke. Father Galsworthy recited the opening clauses of the prayers, while she and Lady Gwendolen joined in the concluding portions.

CHAPTER X

FATHER GALSWORTHY had not been obliged to call upon Hilda in St. James's Square after all. A note from Lady Gwendolen informed him that her daughter and Lord Redman had duly arrived in London, and he was contemplating paying his promised visit, when one morning, as he was sitting in his own room at the Oratory, he was informed that a lady was anxious to see him. He descended to the little rooms on the ground-floor of the building which are set apart for the reception of those who wish for interviews with the Fathers, and in one of these he found Hilda awaiting him.

She evidently had not heard him open the door, and when he entered the apartment she was standing in front of a print of St. Philip Neri, which, with a crucifix, was the only object that adorned its walls. A small table and two or three chairs formed the furniture of the room. On one of the latter was lying a stole of white silk, the ends of which were embroidered with a cross fringed with gold lace. Confessions were often heard by the Fathers in these waiting-rooms, and the vestment, which had evidently been forgotten, was worn by the priests who heard them.

Father Galsworthy paused for a moment on the threshold and gave his visitor a keen, comprehensive

glance. Then he coughed slightly. Hilda started and turned round.

'Ah!' he said. 'Lady Redman, I am very glad to see you. I hope you have not been waiting long,' and he drew a chair forward and motioned to her to sit down. 'Lady Gwendolen told me that you had arrived in London,' he continued, 'and I meant to have taken an opportunity of calling upon you whenever I should find myself in the neighbourhood of St. James's Square. I hope Lord Redman is well—and you also?'

'Walter is very well,' answered Lady Redman; and then she paused.

'That sounds as if you were not so,' said Father Galsworthy, looking at her.

Hilda laughed a little nervously.

'I? Oh, I am very well, Father—at least, as well as I can hope to be just now.'

'Yes, yes, I understand; but, my dear child, I trust you are well in mind, and not only so in body.'

Hilda was silent for a moment.

'No,' she said presently; 'it is that which I have come to see you about.'

Father Galsworthy took up the stole which was lying on the chair near him, and, folding it, placed it on the table.

'You have done quite rightly to come to me if you are in any difficulty,' he said. 'No doubt you are troubled about your husband. It must, of course, be a great sorrow to you to know that he is an unbeliever.'

'I am troubled about myself, Father,' replied Hilda in a low voice.

'Yes?'

'I consulted Father Vincent at Abbotsbridge.'

'And could he not help you?'

'No,' said Hilda wearily. 'He could not understand. Nobody seems to understand; but I am sure that you will do so. That is why I have come.'

Father Galsworthy drew his chair up to the table and rested his elbows upon the latter.

'Let us hope so,' he said abruptly. 'What is your trouble? We will see if a remedy cannot be found for it.'

'Yes,' answered Hilda eagerly. 'I want to tell you everything,' she added, 'from the beginning. It is easier with you—you have always known me, and you also know the circumstances of my marriage.'

'Tell me all,' said Father Galsworthy—'all, that is, which your conscience warns you that you ought to make me acquainted with.'

'You remember how, when I was engaged, I hoped to be the means of bringing Walter into the Church? I thought then that he was unsettled and unhappy in his mind, and that in reality he was longing for some form of faith in which he could believe.'

Father Galsworthy bent his penetrating black eyes upon her, but he said nothing.

'Now,' continued Hilda simply, 'I do not think it any more. I do not know why I believed it when they told me so.'

'When they told you so?' repeated Father Galsworthy. 'When he told you so, you mean.'

Hilda looked at him with surprise.

'Walter?' she exclaimed—'Redman? He never told me so. He never would speak to me about religion.'

Father Galsworthy frowned.

'Go on, my child,' he said.

'Since I have been married,' continued Hilda, 'I have learned to understand my husband better. He is perfectly happy. What his religion may be I do not know, but to say that he possesses none is as untrue as to say that he is unhappy. I know that he is too good to be the latter.'

'Then what is troubling you?' asked Father Galsworthy gravely.

Hilda hesitated for a moment.

'The feeling that I am not doing my duty to the Church—that I cannot do it without breaking my word to my husband.'

'And why are you not doing what your conscience tells you is your duty as a Catholic?'

'Ah, Father, that is what they all ask me—my mother, my grandmother, Father Vincent, all of them.'

'It is a very obvious question.'

'I know it, but——'

'But what?'

'How can I explain? It clashes with that other duty which to me is sacred—my duty to my husband.'

'I see,' replied Father Galsworthy. 'Well?'

Hilda looked at him a little appealingly. His manner was not encouraging, and she felt that he was nearly as difficult to talk to as the Dominican at Abbotsbridge had been. A feeling of disappointment came over her. She had hoped for something different from the Oratorian, who had known her all her life.

'You do not understand,' she said to him after a pause, gathering courage as she spoke. 'You wonder why I should have changed my intentions since my

marriage, and why I have not long ago tried to convert my husband. I dare not.'

Father Galsworthy made a movement of surprise.

'You dare not?' he repeated. 'Why? Is Lord Redman so formidable? I thought you said that he was so—so good to you.'

Hilda smiled faintly.

'That is the very reason,' she replied—'at least, it is one of the reasons. We are so happy together. Until my grandmother spoke to me at Abbotsbury I had none of these doubts and fears which have since oppressed me. I have seen for myself how contented Walter is, and how honourably he maintains his promise to allow me full liberty to practise my religion.'

'I see,' said Father Galsworthy again. 'And the other reasons—what are they?'

'As I say, I dare not interfere with his happiness, and be the one to break our mutual promise. Why should I be faithless to that promise while he is loyal to it? What right have I to attempt to compel him to embrace my faith when his own suffices to him? Can you not understand, Father?'

'Perfectly.'

Hilda gave a little sigh of relief.

'I felt sure that you would,' she exclaimed.

'But,' continued Father Galsworthy, 'you have only told me your reasons for neglecting your duty to the cause of the Church. You have not told me why that neglect should give you so much uneasiness of mind and conscience.'

'Father Vincent would not allow that I have any right to consider what I believe to be my duty to my

husband if that duty is opposed to the claims of the Church. He declares that I have no true love for my husband, and that I am sacrificing the welfare of his soul and my own to——'

'To what?'

'To a purely material passion,' replied Hilda, blushing.

'And does your conscience tell you that Father Vincent is right?' inquired Father Galsworthy.

'That is what I do not know. Sometimes I think he may be so, and that my love for Walter is making me too fearful of saying or doing anything to disturb the happiness which it brings me. At other times I feel that Father Vincent is wrong, and that my action —or, rather, inaction—is prompted by very different motives. My trouble is that I am not sure of myself, Father. At first I felt so sure, and was so happy. But, little by little, the letters I received from my relations disturbed that certainty. Then I went to Father Vincent, as you had advised me to do, and all he said to me unsettled my mind still more. He could not understand that I want to do my duty as a Catholic, but I dare not, and I will not, fail in my promise to my husband. It is a terrible thing to feel that the one course is opposed to the other.'

'Are you sure that it is so opposed?' said Father Galsworthy, less abruptly than he had hitherto spoken.

'Father Vincent assures me that it is, and my own relations all think so.'

Father Galsworthy was silent for a minute or two.

'Well, my dear daughter,' he said presently, 'what we have to do is to ascertain whether you and Father Vincent have not somewhat misunderstood each other,

and whether you have not misunderstood yourself. This may possibly turn out to be at the bottom of all your misgivings and difficulties. To begin with, let us examine this promise which you and your husband made to each other at the time of your engagement. Why did you agree to it, if you did not intend to keep it?'

'But I did intend to keep it.'

'My dear child, did you realize to what you were committing yourself? You were deliberately resigning all the influence over your husband's soul which, as a Catholic, you were bound to do your best to acquire and preserve. And yet, at the same time, you were quieting the reproaches of your conscience for your alliance with a heretic by telling yourself that you were to be the means of bringing him to the Church. There is a grave contradiction of motives here, my daughter, and we must endeavour to discover the true origin of this contradiction.'

'I can explain it,' replied Hilda eagerly. 'I know that it must appear to have been an act of deception both as regards myself and as regards my husband; but in reality it was not so. When I agreed to Walter's condition that we should never interfere with each other's religious opinions, I did so under the impression that he was not happy or settled in his views. I believed that, after we were married, he would of his own accord release me from the promise, and that we should be able to talk freely of these things together. Every week that passed showed me how mistaken I had been in my ideas concerning his longing for some fixed belief, and how impossible it was for me not to adhere to my part of the compact made between us.'

'Did you explain this to Father Vincent?'

'Yes.'

'And what did he say?'

'He told me that I had allowed myself to be too easily persuaded that Walter had any religious ideals—that I had permitted my inclinations to gain the mastery over my religious faith. I do not like to say what he gave me to understand that he considered to be the real impulses which moved me,' concluded Hilda, averting her gaze from Father Galsworthy.

'There is no necessity for you to say it,' returned the latter quietly; 'I quite agree with him.'

Hilda coloured violently.

'Father,' she said, and her voice trembled a little, 'I thought that you said you understood. It is not that!' she added, almost passionately. 'You are all of you mistaken. I am quite sure it is not that.'

Father Galsworthy looked at her calmly.

'And if it were?' he asked, and then he paused. 'If it were,' he continued, always looking at her with a steady, tranquil gaze, 'why should the fact so greatly distress you? Listen to me, my child. You think that we do not understand you. It is not we who do not understand, but you who are misunderstanding yourself. It is no sin to love your husband, and in all such love there must be a carnal, as well as a spiritual, side. The two are not necessarily opposed, any more than the body and the soul are necessarily opposed to each other. You are mistaken in thinking your duty towards your husband and your duty towards the Church to be at variance, and that you are unable to carry out the one without being disloyal to the other. Your doubts upon these points appear to me to arise from a misconception of the true nature of both.'

'If I could only see how!' said Hilda. 'I do not want to be a bad Catholic, Father,' she added earnestly.

'I am sure that you do not. Your uneasiness of mind is a proof of your good intentions. You told me just now you were assured that your husband was very unsettled in his religious views, also that this knowledge largely influenced you in your hopes of converting him, and, it may be presumed, in your determination to marry him. Who gave you such assurances?'

Hilda looked at him with surprise.

'Why,' she replied, 'my grandmother. She told me that she had also said the same thing to you.'

Father Galsworthy shook his head.

'You deceived yourself, my daughter,' he said. 'This is a point upon which you should examine yourself very closely. I do not mean to say,' he added, 'that you did so intentionally, but I fear that in this matter the wish was father to the thought. Your love for Lord Redman made you seize upon any point which could help towards the removal of the very natural dislike which your relatives entertained for the idea of your marriage with a Protestant. Was it not so?'

Hilda was silent. She could not deny the fact that her husband's supposed yearnings for some religious faith had been largely used by her in her conversations with Lady Merton and her relations as an argument to induce the latter to consent to her engagement. Nevertheless, she felt that Father Galsworthy was not presenting the case fairly to her. As Father Vincent had done, only in less uncompromising language, he was

holding her responsible for that which her innermost conscience told her had not originated with herself, but had been the suggestion of others.

Father Galsworthy watched her quietly for a moment or two.

'Are you quite sure,' he continued, 'that, in your anxiety that all should turn out as you and your lover wished, and in order to support your own very natural hopes that through your love he would be brought into the Church, you did not unconsciously lead those around you to regard as a fact what was in reality no more than a supposition on your part? And was not this supposition founded, perhaps, on what you believed that you discerned in your lover's character? Passion is a very insidious thing, my child, and when we are under its influence we are too apt to lose the mastery over our other feelings. We are ready eagerly to grasp at any excuse and at any extenuating circumstances which we can find, if by so doing we can facilitate indulgence in our passion, and at the same time supply our consciences with a plausible reason for having given way to it. If you had been quite honest with yourself in the beginning, you would not now have to regret your neglect of the truest interests of your husband's spiritual welfare. You would not have bound yourself to that promise which now fetters you.'

'I ought never to have agreed to it,' said Hilda. 'In that I have since reproached myself for being dishonest —both to my husband and to myself. I should have realized that I was failing in my duty as a Catholic, and that I had no right to trust to other agencies to promote the conversion of my husband, which I then so earnestly desired. I have often repented bitterly of

my dishonesty; for now I know that, though I have kept the letter of my promise, the spirit in which it was made was a false spirit.'

'Ah! you realize this?' asked Father Galsworthy.

'I cannot help realizing it. I ought to have told Walter that I could not make such a promise when all the time I was praying that it might be given to me to bring him into the fold of the Church.'

'And why do you consider yourself as bound to keep a promise the spirit of which, to use your own words, you know to be false?'

'A promise is a promise,' replied Hilda simply. 'However much I may regret having made it, I do not feel the less bound to respect it. Indeed, I feel all the more bound to do so because, if I have deceived my husband once by pretending to be indifferent to his religious views, I do not wish to do so a second time by failing to observe a mutual compact which he is so scrupulous in maintaining. That,' she continued, 'is another thing which I could not make Father Vincent understand, nor will my own family see what I mean. To me it is so clear. I regard it as a point of honour. If my husband attempted to interfere with me in my religion, I should consider that he was acting dishonourably. Would he not have an equal right to think the same of me under similar circumstances?'

Father Galsworthy listened patiently to her. Once or twice he seemed to be about to interrupt her, but he checked himself.

'There can be no point of honour in a matter which has its origin in a dishonest act,' he said, when he had heard her to the end. 'Here again,' he continued, 'I think Father Vincent was right. The truth is, you

have been deceiving yourself throughout; or, rather, you have been allowing your love for your husband to deceive you. No,' he added, as Hilda made a gesture which had something of impatience and denial in it, 'do not misunderstand me, my dear child. I am not blaming you. As I said before, it is no sin for a wife to love her husband; and even the grosser and more material part of that love can, if rightly used, be purged of its sinful nature. With what other object was the Sacrament of Matrimony instituted by God and approved by the Church? But this, the carnal element in the love which should exist between husband and wife, has need of careful watching, lest it assume the mastery over that spiritual element which alone can bring true happiness in the married state. It should never be forgotten that the former is a concession by God to the weakness of human nature, not to the strength of human affection. Have you not been in danger of forgetting this? And is not your present state of trouble and difficulty the direct result of this forgetfulness?'

'How, Father?' murmured Hilda.

'I will tell you. It began by allowing you to deceive others; it has ended by encouraging you to deceive yourself. It has blinded you to a proper sense of your responsibilities towards the higher and more spiritual attributes of your love. It has made you fearful where you should have been courageous, weak where you should have been strong. You are content to seize hold of any pretext which can afford you an excuse for turning a deaf ear to the remonstrances of your conscience. You dread to disturb your present happiness, but you are not afraid to remain inactive while

the soul of the husband whom you profess to love is in deadly peril. My dear daughter, can you wonder that you are troubled? You should rather thank God that you are so, as those who love you thank Him for allowing your conscience to speak and arouse in you a truer sense of your duties towards Him.'

Father Galsworthy paused, and Hilda's gaze strayed beyond him to the window, whence she could see across the piece of garden outside it to the Brompton Road. She followed absently the stream of cabs and omnibuses passing to and fro along the thoroughfare, and found herself wondering, with that curious interest in trivialities which so often overtakes us in moments of mental anxiety or emotion, what the people who sat on the tops of the latter were thinking about as they looked over the boundary wall into the precincts of the Oratory. What were the lives of those careless-looking human beings speeding eastward and westward? Did they give a thought in passing to the tales of moral distress and perplexity which, perchance, were being told a few yards away from them?

The sound of Father Galsworthy's voice arrested Hilda's wandering thoughts. His tones were somewhat less harsh and abrupt than they had hitherto been.

'You think that I am judging you severely, do you not, my child?' he was saying to her. 'And yet,' he added, 'I hope to make you realize how I am striving to show you the true causes of your distress of mind, in order that, knowing them, you may be able to eradicate them, and so procure for yourself that peace for which you are longing. I hope I have succeeded in explaining to you how you have deceived yourself—or, rather, how

your carnal love for your husband has deceived you and made you incapable of correctly analyzing your own motives. There is another point, however, which I want to impress upon you. Do not think that we, the ministers of the Church, to whom you have turned for advice, are not able to sympathize with you in your very natural repugnance to breaking what I am sure you conscientiously believe to be a sacred promise. I said just now that it was possible Father Vincent misunderstood your motives, and I still believe that he did so. He does not know you as I know you, and, though our conclusions are the same, I should not counsel you to attempt to interfere with the natural course of your wifely affection for your husband. I would not have you despise it, nor even have you regard it as the direct cause of your difficulties, but rather as the indirect cause. The direct cause, my daughter, has been your own want of faith in the Church, your own heedlessness of the Church's claims and authority. Had you possessed a proper sense of these, even your material love for your husband would have been powerless to make you forget your responsibilities towards his soul. Have you considered the difference between your position and his? I do not think you can have done so. You have the priceless heritage of the Faith, and it rests with yourself to be a partaker in all those joys to which the Church can admit her children. But how is it with your husband? He is not even a believing Protestant. He cannot, therefore, participate in those spiritual benefits which we may reasonably hope that God in His mercy will eventually confer on all conscientious believers in Christianity, even though these be not of His Church.

You have married this man, my child, whose soul is condemned to everlasting punishment unless a means of grace be found to intervene and save him from himself and from his doom. When your hour comes for judgment, will it serve your cause, think you, to plead this loyalty to a compact which you know in your heart to be sinful—a compact made with the Evil One to hinder the divine truth from reaching the ears and the heart of a soul which is groping in the darkness in search of it? Will you not be asked what steps you took—you, a Catholic—to help your husband in his struggle with scepticism and unbelief? And what will your answer be?'

Hilda hid her face in her hands, and her bosom heaved convulsively. The strain was too great after weeks of doubt and self-torture. Father Galsworthy had struck a chord on the keyboard of the Unknown which he knew would find an awakening echo in the heart of the woman before him.

'There is yet another point to remind you of,' he continued pitilessly. 'You will soon be a mother. I need not warn you of the bodily peril with which you must shortly be brought face to face. It is not the sense of personal danger, or the fear that you might be called to give an account of your stewardship sooner than you had expected, which I should wish to be the means of arousing you to a right understanding of your responsibilities. The future of other souls, besides that of your husband, may depend upon your recognising these responsibilities—of souls yet to be born throughout all the ages. Are you prepared to face the risks of making no effort to prevent your children, and those who come after them, from being exposed to the in-

fluence of infidelity? Is the keeping of a promise, hastily made and indefensible in itself, and the selfish dread of interfering with a material happiness, to lose countless souls to the Church and work your own future misery? Ah, my child, it is you, not we, who do not understand! it is you who are walking blindly and heedlessly towards an abyss, while we shrink back appalled at what we see before you and those who depend upon you, and strive to hold you back.'

'What can I do, Father? Tell me, what can I do?' exclaimed Hilda, in a broken voice.

Father Galsworthy rose from his chair and paced up and down the room with the firm, swinging step which belonged rather to the cavalry officer than to the priest.

'Do?' he said abruptly. 'Your duty—that is what you have to do. Refuse to listen any longer to the voices which are striving to keep you from it. Answer them that you know them for what they are, and whence they come. They will soon leave you in peace. Break through this imaginary barrier which separates you from your husband in spiritual things and only permits you the enjoyment of material things. Oblige him to listen to you. "The kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent do take it by force." You will have trouble, perhaps. The tranquillity and domestic happiness which you have prized so much, and for which you have risked so much, may seem to break up and disappear for a time. But what of that? The knowledge that you are working to save your husband's soul, that you are a Catholic fighting for the cause of the Church, will support you through the darkest hours. The Blessed Mother of God will be by

your side, and every day the path will become clearer to you.'

Hilda sat listening in silence to Father Galsworthy's words, her mind full of conflicting emotions. It was all so plausible, and the Oratorian's advice was so sound, but—— and here she found herself confronted by the same doubts which she had experienced during her interviews with Father Vincent at Abbotsbridge. It seemed to her that Father Galsworthy had taken her case out of her hands and dexterously worked it up so that it no longer was her own. He had imputed to her motives, thoughts, and feelings which she was not conscious of possessing, or of ever having possessed. He had taken it for granted that she had deceived her relatives into believing her husband to have an unsatisfied desire for some form of religious belief, and her conscience, to which her counsellor had so often appealed, and of which he appeared to hold the key, told her that she had done nothing of the kind. She was convinced it was not she who had assumed that Walter would surely become a Catholic after his marriage to her. The idea had been suggested to her—how, she had no very clear remembrance—and she had caressed it and dwelt upon it until she had grown to regard it as a fact. But Father Galsworthy had been so explicit in his statement, so clear in his deductions, that she felt almost persuaded she had indeed, as he said, allowed the wish to be father to the thought, and that she had traded upon Walter's imaginary yearnings after religious faith in order to overcome the difficulties which stood in the way of her engagement, and the material satisfaction of her love. She felt unable to separate in her own mind the truth of Father Gals-

worthy's words from the untruth which she was vaguely conscious lurked behind them, or the half-truths in them which were the hardest of all to dispute. She was not aware that she had been subjected to an experimental system in a psychological laboratory, and her mind was left dazed and confused, conscious only of doubt and of a great weariness.

Had Father Galsworthy stopped short at attempting to demonstrate her culpability in having allowed her material love for her husband to permit her to deceive herself and others, a sense of justice to herself would probably have asserted itself in Hilda, as it had done in the case of her last interview with Father Vincent. At the bottom of her heart there remained the consciousness that her engagement to Walter Redman had been the result of a mutual affection—a purely human love, with which, whatever the priests might say, spiritual things had nothing to do. It was in vain that she tried to persuade herself that this was not the case. She had wanted to possess Walter, and Walter had wanted to possess her. This was the stubborn truth, which insisted upon asserting itself, notwithstanding all the sophistries which sought to disguise it and hide it out of sight beneath a cloak of spirituality, as though it were some unclean thing.

Hilda was conscious of the fact that, when she and her husband had fallen in love with one another, the question of their individual ideas upon matters of religion had been of no consideration whatever to either of them, and she had been obliged to confess to herself that it was only owing to the accident of her [illegible] Catholic that the question had ever arisen. [illegible]er Church which was responsible for the [illegible] the super-

natural into the natural element of their affection. She was quite aware that the Church to which her husband nominally belonged would have advanced no such claims, and would have formulated no such stipulations as those to which the latter had been obliged to submit before he could make her his wife.

The more closely she questioned herself upon the subject, the clearer did it become to her that not only had her anxiety that Walter should embrace her faith been non-existent at the time when she first began to love him, but that this had been an element which had been introduced, or had introduced itself, gradually into her love, and which was altogether extraneous to it. It was in the introduction of this extraneous element that the deception lay for which her spiritual directors and her relations sought to hold her responsible. The single deception, however, for which, in her calmer moments of reflection, she felt able to reproach herself, was the promise made to her husband to leave him absolute freedom in his religious opinions when she had already allowed herself earnestly to desire his conversion to her own. It was Walter whom she felt she had deceived; not, as Father Galsworthy insisted, herself and her relations.

So long as Father Galsworthy had confined his arguments to these limits, Hilda had experienced a series of conflicting emotions in which perplexity, distrust, and disbelief had in turn played their parts. The speciousness of his arguments notwithstanding, she felt that he did not comprehend her scruples and difficulties any better than her Dominican adviser had done.

Father Galsworthy, however, had carried his reason-

ing further than the latter. He had entrenched himself behind the spiritual powers of the Church, and had revealed a picture of the future results of Hilda's neglect to assert the Church's claims the more terrible because, from all which the Church taught her, and required her to believe, it was a logical one.

Against the judgment of the Church, delivered by a priest of the Church, there was no possible appeal, and Hilda's religious training told her that Father Galsworthy's arguments as to the inevitable results of her refusal to try and compass her husband's conversion both to his soul and her own, and probably to those of their descendants, were unanswerable.

A great horror possessed her as she listened to his words. The question as to whether or not she were too much under the domination of a carnal love, or whether or not she had allowed her conduct to be swayed by this love, shrank into utter insignificance beside the vista which unfolded itself before her imagination in response to Father Galsworthy's reasoning. How could she venture, in the face of such a warning, proceeding from such a source, to refuse to act up to her responsibilities as a Catholic? She had declared that she dared not undertake the responsibility of interfering with her husband's religion; but could she dare to incur that of allowing his soul to perish everlastingly for want of an effort on her part to save it? And her children, when they came—her little innocent children—what if they should fall, as Father Galsworthy had warned her, under the influence of their father's infidelity? Had she not read that it was better for a man to have a millstone hanged round his neck and to be cast into the sea, than that he should

offend one of Christ's little ones? What, then, should be the condemnation of a mother who had left her little ones' souls in danger of eternal loss?

As she listened to Father Galsworthy's words, memories of the old, peaceful life at Cawarden in the days of her girlhood returned to Hilda's mind. She was in the chapel again, kneeling before the high altar, joining in the litanies and the hymns to the Blessed Virgin, or bowing her head to receive the Body of her Saviour from the hands of the old chaplain who had listened to her childish confession and understood so well all her childish troubles and difficulties. It had all been so easy, and so happy, in those years when heaven and hell seemed far-away places, and the troubles of the day melted away in the hours of the night—to be forgotten with the morrow's sun.

Father Galsworthy had resumed his seat and sat watching Hilda in silence.

Every now and then, as some door was opened, the sound of chanting and the strains of the great organ echoed down the corridor from the church, and penetrated into the room, while from without came the confused roar of the traffic and the cries of the flower-sellers.

Hilda rose from her chair. She was very pale, and her face bore the traces of the emotion which she endeavoured to conceal.

'Well, my child,' said Father Galsworthy, 'have you considered carefully what I have told you? Believe me, the path is not so hard a one as you think.'

Hilda Redman looked at him.

'Yes,' she replied; 'I have considered.'

'And you will listen to the voice of the Church?'

'I do not know.'

'You do not know?' repeated Father Galsworthy, in amazement. 'My daughter,' he added, 'do you presume to doubt the authority of that voice?'

'Not over myself—no, but over my husband.'

'The Church has authority over all souls, even over those who are the most estranged from her. Think of what I have said to you to-day, I implore of you, my dear child. Do not allow valuable time to slip away, for who can tell how much may be granted to you in which to fulfil your duty? Reflect what the consequences must be if you should only realize your responsibilities when it is too late. You are tired, upset. Quiet reflection will calm you and open your heart to the call of our holy religion. Come to me again whenever you wish, but do not turn back from the task which Almighty God has set you; do not dare to delay any longer in striving to execute it. Do you wish to make your confession before you go?' he added, taking up the stole from the table.

Hilda shook her head.

'No, Father,' she said, in a low voice, holding out her hand. 'I will leave you now. I am tired, and I want to think.'

Father Galsworthy accompanied her to the door of the room.

'You have your carriage waiting for you?' he asked.

'I told them to wait for me outside the door of the church. I think I will go in there for a little while before I go h .'

'Do, m ., and implore the aid of our Blessed

Lady of Good Counsel,' said Father Galsworthy. 'Come this way, then,' he added, and took her down a passage whence a door communicated with the church. 'I will remember you in the Holy Mass,' he said. 'God bless you, my child! Pray for me.'

And opening the door, he drew back, and allowed Hilda to enter the sacred building alone.

CHAPTER XI

'LET us hope, Gwen, that she and Walter will regard it as a warning sent from God—a sign of His displeasure.'

Lady Merton was sitting with her daughter in the library of the Redmans' house in St. James's Square. Lady Gwendolen looked anxious and unhappy, and every now and then she glanced nervously at the door, as if expecting someone to enter it with news which might be of a bad nature.

'It is marvellous,' continued Lady Merton, 'how clearly God speaks to us sometimes! Do not be afraid, Gwen; I feel sure that Hilda will recover, and in due time we shall realize that, in His all-seeing wisdom, He has visited us with this trial for a merciful purpose.'

'I feel so terribly anxious,' exclaimed Lady Gwendolen, 'even though Siddons' last report was more favourable. Walter promised to let me know at six o'clock how she was. It is past six now,' she added, glancing at the clock on the chimney-piece.

'At any rate,' said Lady Merton, 'Hilda is in good hands. Siddons is wonderfully clever, and he is confident that all will go well with her. I must say,' she continued, 'that he has been very arbitrary in excluding us all from her room, and I am very angry with him for refusing to employ the Sister whom I

recommended. She is an excellent nurse, well accustomed to these cases, and it is shocking to think that when her life is in danger poor dear Hilda should be surrounded by nobody but Protestants. Do you know what I cannot help suspecting, Gwen?'

'What, mamma?'

'Why, that Walter has persuaded Siddons not to allow us to come near her, and that Sister Veronica was not permitted to nurse her because she is a religious. They want to keep all Catholics away from her.'

'Oh, I really don't think so,' replied Lady Gwendolen. 'Siddons, of course, likes to have his own nurse in so critical a case—all these great accoucheurs do.'

'These doctors think of nothing but the body,' said Lady Merton, sighing. 'I told Walter so, and I must say he was quite rude to me. Ah!' she added, checking herself abruptly as the door of the library opened, 'here he is.'

Lady Gwendolen rose hurriedly from her seat, and went forward to meet her son-in-law.

'How is she?' she asked, in anxious tones.

'Better, thank God!' said Lord Redman. 'Siddons is much more satisfied about her.'

He was very pale, and his voice shook a little as he replied to Lady Gwendolen's question.

'Can I see her?' asked the latter.

'I am afraid not. She must see no one.'

Lady Merton gave a snort of disapproval.

'Really, Walter,' she said, 'is her own mother always to be kept from her? That is carrying things a little too far.'

Lord Redman looked at her quietly.

'Do you think so?' he replied coldly.

Lady Merton felt considerably ruffled in her temper. She was not accustomed to having her opinions ignored, and the tone of Walter Redman's voice was more than significant.

'I certainly do think it,' she returned, 'and so does your mother-in-law. I never heard of anything so monstrous in my life.'

'Had you not better tell Dr. Siddons so? I am only repeating his directions.'

'Well, Walter,' answered Lady Merton, 'of course, if you like to deprive your wife of the consolation of having her mother and those of her own faith about her when she is lying at death's door, I have nothing more to say.'

Lord Redman made a step towards her, and seemed as though he were about to reply angrily. Whatever his inclination may have been, however, he restrained it.

'I am glad,' he answered, 'that you have nothing more to say on this point, Lady Merton;' and then he turned to Lady Gwendolen.

'Siddons thinks that there is every probability of her doing well now,' he continued; 'but I am sure you will understand me, Lady Gwendolen, when I say that it is still absolutely necessary to keep her perfectly quiet. Your presence would excite her, and any excitement might be fatal.'

Lady Merton got up from the armchair in which she had been sitting.

'Will you be so kind as to ring and ask for my carriage?' she said to Lord Redman. 'If we are never to be allowed access to Hilda, I do not see the use of

my remaining. Gwen,' she continued, turning to her daughter, 'you will stay here again to-night, I conclude, in case Hilda should not be so well.'

Walter accompanied Lady Merton to her carriage, which had been waiting at the door for her, and it was with a feeling of relief that he watched it drive away.

'A little more,' he muttered to himself as he turned to re-enter the house, 'and I should have lost my temper and told that old cat some home-truths!'

The day before Walter had been hastily summoned from a debate in the House of Lords by a messenger who brought him the tidings that Hilda had been suddenly taken ill. Knowing that her confinement was not expected to take place before another month had elapsed, and full of anxious misgivings, he jumped into a hansom and drove rapidly home. Since her arrival in London, Lord Redman had noticed that his wife looked even paler and more suffering than she had done at Abbotsbury, and he had taken an opportunity of having a private interview with Dr. Siddons on the subject of her health.

The opinion of that great accoucheur confirmed the suspicions which he had formed at Abbotsbury as to the causes of Hilda's anxious and troubled demeanour.

'Lady Redman has something on her mind,' Dr. Siddons told him, after he had paid Hilda one or two visits. 'There is nothing organically wrong, and everything is pursuing its normal course, so far; but some extraneous causes are threatening to exert a prejudicial effect upon her state of health. Have you any clue as to what may be troubling her?' he inquired.

Walter had hesitated to mention his suspicions, as

to the correctness of which he felt he had no positive evidence.

'I have thought it possible,' he replied, 'that my wife is troubling herself about religious matters. She is a Roman Catholic, and I am not. There are no disagreements between us on this point,' he had hastened to add, 'and we never discuss the subject.'

The doctor looked thoughtful.

'Ah!' he said, 'religion has played me a bad turn more than once in my profession. If you take my advice, Lord Redman, you will keep her mind off the subject as much as you can. The time to think about religion is when we are well. It is a very poor doctor.'

When Walter reached St. James's Square he found his wife very ill. There was no doubt as to what was about to happen, and a messenger had already been despatched to summon Doctor Siddons. Hilda begged her husband not to leave her until the latter should arrive, and he had to promise her again and again that he would not do so before she would be pacified. He saw that she followed his movements with a look in her eyes which was both apprehensive and frightened, as though she dreaded to lose sight of him for an instant.

Presently she said to him, in a low, faint voice:

'Walter!'

He bent over her tenderly.

'I want you to promise me something. You will think it very strange, I know, but you will promise, will you not?'

She gripped his hand feverishly, and her face was flushed as she gazed at him intently.

'Of course, dear, of course!' he answered soothingly.

'Siddons will be here directly, and the pain will soon be over,' he added.

'It is not the pain,' said Hilda hurriedly. 'It is very bad, but it is not that. I want to tell you before they come. Do not let them come, Walter. Promise me that you will not let them come.'

'Who, dearest?'

'They will come and tell me terrible things,' she continued excitedly. 'You do not know, but they have told me such dreadful things, and I am frightened, Walter. Promise me,' she exclaimed again, with her eyes fixed upon his face.

Walter Redman looked keenly at her. For a moment he believed that she was wandering in her mind.

'No,' she said, as though divining his thought—'no, I am not raving. Promise me.'

'Nobody shall come near you whom you do not want,' he answered her gently. 'I am here to take care of you. But tell me who you mean. Who has been frightening you?'

Even as he spoke the suspicion as to whom she referred struck him, and the thought made his blood boil within him.

'Tell me,' he said again, almost imperiously.

'My grandmother—and Father Galsworthy,' whispered Hilda, casting a terrified glance at the door: 'my mother, too. It is not her fault, but they make her tell me things—such terrible things, Walter! I do not want them to come to me, and I know that they will if you do not prevent them.'

Walter Redman ground his teeth.

'They shall not come near you, Hilda; I swear it,' he said.

She lay back with a sigh of relief, and then smiled at him—a faint, wan little smile.

'That is enough,' she whispered. 'I know that you keep your promises. There is one more thing,' she added. 'Do not let them send anybody—no nurse, I mean, or doctor.'

'Siddons will take charge of you,' Walter said gently. 'Do not be afraid. You are quite safe with him, and no one shall come in here without his permission.'

At this moment Hilda's maid entered the room.

'Lady Gwendolen Cawarden is here, my lord,' she said in a low voice.

Hilda clutched his arm.

'No, Walter—no!' she exclaimed.

'Hush!' he said. 'Listen, Hilda.' And then, in a louder voice, he said to the maid: 'Tell Lady Gwendolen that I am with her ladyship, and that nobody else can see her until Dr. Siddons arrives.'

As the woman turned to leave the room, the door opened a second time, and Dr. Siddons came in, followed by a nurse.

Hilda looked at the latter, and then glanced at her husband inquiringly.

'One of your nurses?' asked Walter of the doctor.

The latter looked surprised.

'Yes,' he replied. 'Fortunately, I knew where to find her, so I brought her with me. You had better leave us now, Lord Redman. I will come to you later on.'

Walter looked at his wife. Dr. Siddons' presence seemed to have had a tranquillizing effect upon her, and he himself felt somewhat reassured by the latter's quiet, confident manner. With a silent pressure of Hilda's hand he left the room.

As he descended the staircase he encountered Lady Gwendolen, accompanied by a nun.

'Dr. Siddons is with her now,' he said to his mother-in-law.

'Is it——'

'Yes, undoubtedly; but I know nothing. Siddons has this moment arrived.'

As he spoke, Walter looked at the nun and then at Lady Gwendolen.

'This is Sister Veronica,' explained the latter. 'A nurse will be a necessity. Sister Veronica is admirable in these cases, and has the highest certificates. Of course, my mother and I guessed what was wrong. When the message reached me I was at her house, and my mother sent for Sister Veronica instantly. Had she not better go to Hilda at once?'

'Sister Veronica's services will not be required,' replied Lord Redman somewhat curtly. 'I am sorry that Lady Merton had the trouble of sending for her. Siddons, of course, prefers his own nurses, and he has brought one of them with him. She is already assisting him.'

Lady Gwendolen looked somewhat taken aback.

'My mother will be very disappointed, Walter,' she said. 'She has great confidence in Sister Veronica.'

Her son-in-law did not reply.

'James,' he called to a servant who was waiting in the hall, 'get a cab for this lady.'

Lady Gwendolen interposed nervously.

'Oh, Walter!' she said, 'had we not better wait for my mother? She is coming here immediately.'

Lord Redman turned to the Sister.

'I am sorry,' he said courteously, 'that you should

have had the trouble of coming here, but, as you see, Lady Merton has made a mistake.'

'Perhaps,' said Sister Veronica, 'a second nurse may be necessary. If so, I should be very pleased to place myself at Dr. Siddons' service.'

'Thank you; but if Dr. Siddons finds that a second nurse is required, he will make his own arrangements. The case is entirely in his hands.'

Sister Veronica made no reply. At this moment the footman informed Lord Redman that a cab was at the door, and she followed him to it.

Walter and Lady Gwendolen went into the library, and no sooner had the hansom left than Lady Merton's carriage drove up to the house, and she was shown into the room.

'My dear Walter,' she said, as the door closed upon her, 'I need hardly ask what is the matter. Poor dear Hilda! What can have brought it on so soon? However, let us trust that all will be well. Let me see, eight months, is it not? To be sure, it would have been better had it been seven; but, as I say, we will pray that all may go well with her and the child. Siddons is here, of course, and the nurse I sent directly the news reached us? Sister Veronica is an admirable nurse, Walter, and a very holy woman. She will be a great comfort to dear Hilda.'

'The person you sent has gone away, Lady Merton; her services here are not required.'

'Not required!' exclaimed Lady Merton. 'But, Walter, of course they are required! Hilda must have a nurse.'

'She has one. Siddons has provided for that.'

'And you have sent Sister Veronica away? Gwen,

what were you thinking of to allow such a thing? What do we know of this nurse of Dr. Siddons? Hilda would naturally have preferred a Sister of Charity about her, and Sister Veronica is a lady. She belongs to the Order of St. Vincent de Paul, and besides being a trained nurse, she is a true saint.'

Walter Redman looked her full in the face.

'My wife has more need of bodily assistance just now than of spiritual advice, Lady Merton,' he replied quietly.

Lady Merton cast down her eyes.

'It seems to me that you forget Hilda is a Catholic, Walter,' she said. 'We do not look upon these things in the same light that you do. I am deeply grieved,' she added, 'to think that my grand-daughter should be deprived of the services of a person whose presence by her sick-bed would have been the greatest consolation to her. However, you are *dans votre droit*, and we can say nothing.'

Fearing lest he should be led into making remarks which he might afterwards regret, Walter left the two alone together, after telling them that he would bring Dr. Siddons to them so soon as the latter should have left Hilda.

The air of the library seemed to stifle him, and he felt that he could no longer endure Lady Merton's presence. Restless and uneasy, he wandered about the house, straining his ears to catch the faintest sound, yet dreading to hear anything. Hours seemed to have passed before he heard low voices in the corridor outside Hilda's room, and Dr. Siddons came down the staircase. His face was grave, and Walter's heart sank within him as he studied it.

'Lady Redman is in a very critical state,' he said. 'I need hardly tell you that it is a case of premature confinement.'

Lord Redman led him into his own room, which adjoined the library.

'Is she——' he began; then his voice failed him, and he stood looking at Dr. Siddons in silence.

The latter knew what he wished to ask; he heard the question so often.

'I hope not,' he replied, 'and I think not. But it would be useless to disguise to you that the case is critical. There are many such, however, and I have seen recoveries made from more serious ones than this.'

'The child?'

'Stillborn,' answered Dr. Siddons—'a male child.'

'It is better so,' said Lord Redman.

The doctor glanced at him with surprise.

'That is the cause of all the trouble,' he remarked.

'Perhaps so. You are naturally better able to judge than I. Dr. Siddons,' added Walter suddenly, 'can you account for this premature confinement?'

'I cannot,' replied the doctor. 'Can you tell me of anything which may have caused it? Lady Redman has not been over-exerting herself, or committing any imprudences, I suppose?'

'She has not been over-exerting her body, certainly. You discovered for yourself that she was over-exerting her mind. Could this fact be in any way responsible for her present state?'

'I should think it could indeed!' exclaimed Dr. Siddons. 'When I visited Lady Redman,' he continued, 'I found, as I told you at the time, so that,

far as I could judge, things were pursuing their normal course, but my observation of her convinced me that she was labouring under some very marked distress of mind. The fact made me uneasy lest it should cause mischief, and I cannot say that it was altogether a surprise to me when I was summoned here to-day and found her in this condition.'

'Dr. Siddons,' said Walter, 'I can, I know, rely upon your discretion and silence if I tell you of certain matters the knowledge of which may assist you in your treatment of my wife's case.'

The doctor bowed.

'Of course, Lord Redman, I regard such confidences as sacred,' he replied.

'I have just discovered,' continued Walter, 'that my wife has been far more distressed in her mind than I have suspected. I thought, as I told you, that she was troubling herself over the difference in our religion, and I had very good reasons for believing that her anxieties were largely due to outside influences which were being brought to bear upon her. Before your arrival to-day I was with her, and I then discovered that she was in a condition, not of mental uneasiness and distress only, but of positive terror.'

Dr. Siddons looked at him curiously.

'Ah!' he said sharply, 'about what?'

'I think that it will only be necessary for me to tell you of a promise which she implored me to make her in order to enable you to form your own conclusions on that point,' replied Walter. 'My wife,' he continued, 'asked me to promise her that neither her own relatives nor any person sent by them, nor a priest to whom, I believe, she is in the habit of con-

fessing, should be allowed to come near her in her illness.'

'You promised this, of course?'

'Of course! I tremble to think what the effect of not having done so would have had upon her. I did more, Dr. Siddons: I promised her that you, no less than myself, would make it impossible that anyone should approach her except those whom you authorized to do so.'

'You did quite rightly, Lord Redman. But are you not, perhaps, attributing a little too much importance to Lady Redman's words? You must remember that women in her state are apt to take strange fancies into their heads. Besides this, the pain and the physical fear from which she was suffering would naturally have unnerved her.'

'Her mother, Lady Gwendolen Cawarden, and her grandmother, Lady Merton, are in the next room,' replied Walter quietly, pointing to the library. 'When I left you, and the nurse whom you brought with you, with my wife, I went downstairs to see Lady Gwendolen, who had already arrived. I met her on the staircase, accompanied by a nun—a Sister Veronica—who, she explained, had been engaged as a nurse for my wife by Lady Merton. The latter has assured me that Sister Veronica is not only a certificated nurse, but also a saint.'

'And what did you do, Lord Redman?'

'I told the footman to call a cab.'

The gravity of Dr. Siddons' face relaxed for a moment.

'I am very glad you have told me,' he said, after a pause; 'and you were quite right in saying that I

should be able to form my own conclusions on the subject. I have formed them, and, so long as Lady Redman remains under my care, I shall be guided by them.'

'I trust to you to use your authority as her doctor, should it be required,' said Walter.

'Do not doubt it. And now,' continued Dr. Siddons, 'I must return to my patient. I hope that I may be able to give you a better report towards evening. For the next few hours I shall not leave the house.'

'If you can stay a few moments more before you go upstairs, I should be glad if you would come with me into the library,' said Lord Redman. 'Lady Gwendolen will be very anxious to hear your report, as, naturally, I have not been able to tell her anything definite.'

The two went together into the adjoining room, where Lady Gwendolen and her mother were sitting talking in low tones to each other.

'Here is Dr. Siddons,' Walter said, and they both came anxiously forward to question him.

'I cannot commit myself to an opinion,' the doctor replied in answer to their demands. 'Lady Redman is in a very critical condition—a premature confinement of a stillborn child—a boy.'

Lady Merton wiped her eyes with her pocket-handkerchief.

'It is a judgment!' she said in an undertone to her daughter.

'Can I not see her, Dr. Siddons? It would be such a comfort to me only to be in the room, and to feel my daughter knew that I was with her!' said Lady Gwendolen.

'Impossible!' answered Dr. Siddons gravely. 'I am sorry to be obliged to refuse you, Lady Gwendolen, but nobody except myself and the nurse must enter my patient's room. I will not answer for the consequences if my directions are disregarded.'

'I am afraid there has been a misunderstanding about the nurse, Dr. Siddons,' said Lady Merton. 'I had engaged a Sister in whose skill I have great confidence, but Lord Redman tells me that you have no need of her, and he has sent her away.'

'Lord Redman is quite right,' replied Dr. Siddons. 'I make a point of being assisted in my cases by nurses whose capabilities are personally known to me.'

'But perhaps a second may be required? I can easily send again for Sister Veronica. Would it not be wiser?' asked Lady Merton.

'I do not require a second nurse, Lady Merton, and should it become necessary to engage one, I must still insist that she shall be a woman who is accustomed to nursing under my orders. I do not know Sister Veronica. My nurses,' he added dryly, 'have only one calling in life. If they take to a second, I cease to entrust my patients to their charge.'

'But, Dr. Siddons, I don't think you quite understand, and neither does Lord Redman,' returned Lady Merton. 'My daughter and I are positive that it would be a great consolation to your patient to have a person of her own faith about her. To us Catholics these things, which no doubt appear to you to be unimportant, are very precious.'

Dr. Siddons smiled a little sarcastically.

'I beg your pardon, Lady Merton. You are quite right: I did not understand you. I thought that you

were recommending Sister—Veronica, is it?—as a nurse. I regret to say that Lady Redman is not at present in a condition to occupy herself with spiritual matters. It would be highly injurious to her bodily health to do so.'

Lady Merton shrugged her shoulders and turned away from him somewhat abruptly.

'Are we, my daughter and I, to understand that we are forbidden to approach Lady Redman?' she asked presently.

'Yes, if you please,' replied Dr. Siddons suavely; 'that is my request, as Lady Redman's medical adviser.'

'Walter,' said Lady Merton, 'what is your opinion? Do you wish your wife to be debarred from the presence of her own relations—her own mother—at such a moment?'

'Certainly, under the circumstances.'

Lady Merton glanced at him, one of her oblique little glances from beneath her half-closed eyelids.

'Under what circumstances?' she asked. 'Could any circumstances demand a mother's presence more urgently than the present?'

Dr. Siddons interposed a little hastily. He had seen a look on Lord Redman's face which betrayed the latter's rising anger.

'I am sorry to appear to be such a tyrant,' he said. 'But I am sure you will remember, Lady Merton, that a grave responsibility rests with us doctors in such a case as Lady Redman's. My professional experience tells me that she must be kept from all risks of excitement or emotion. You and Lady Gwendolen must exercise a little patience, if you will pardon me

for telling you so. The next few hours will, I have every reason to hope, bring with them an improvement; but for the present, and, indeed, for some days to come, I must insist that, while I am in charge of Lady Redman's case, my instructions shall be scrupulously carried out. If you will excuse me,' he added, 'I must return at once to my duties.'

Walter Redman and he left the library together.

'You see how matters stand,' said the former, as they went up the staircase. 'I can rely upon you, doctor, to help me to protect my wife from these good ladies?'

'You may, indeed, Lord Redman. It is not the first time I have met with this sort of thing in my career, as I told you the other day, I think, when you came to see me.'

'You can give me some hope?' asked Walter earnestly, as they reached the landing near which Hilda's rooms were situated.

'Yes,' replied Dr. Siddons, 'I can. Lady Redman is strong and healthy. Of course, unforeseen circumstances may occur—one never can be sure in these cases for some days, as you know. If all goes well, however, during the next twenty-four hours, I shall be able to speak with greater confidence. But pray understand, Lord Redman, that I do not at all regard the case as hopeless, but only as critical.'

'May I see her?'

'Not yet. Later on—to-morrow perhaps—it may do her good to see you for a few minutes. Possibly,' he added, with a smile, 'it will help to pacify the ladies downstairs if they know that I have excluded you from her room.'

'And you can trust the nurse not to admit anyone, under any pretext?'

'Certainly! You need be under no fear about that. She will carry out my instructions implicitly.'

Dr. Siddons left Walter in the corridor, and disappeared noiselessly into his patient's room. Lord Redman felt no inclination to face Lady Merton and his mother-in-law again for the present. The words which had escaped his wife, the confession that had so evidently been wrung from her by pain and nervous terror, had horrified and disgusted him. He knew Hilda well enough to feel sure that she must have suffered far more in her mind than he had any idea of. Had it not been so, he felt convinced that she would never have opened her lips on the subject. He could vaguely guess at those terrible things which had been told to her, and which, during the months of her pregnancy, had worked upon her imagination and her fears until they had left her a prey to hideous anxieties which had brought about the present catastrophe. If she died, he thought, with impotent rage in his heart, these pious people would have murdered her, as they had murdered her child—his child. They would talk about their God, and their imaginary saints, and their holy religion, and they would have Masses said for her soul. Walter Redman walked savagely up and down the thickly-carpeted corridor outside the room where his wife lay, consuming himself in his own thoughts, and cursing the God whose worshippers and votaries were such as these. It was as well that Lady Merton could not see him just then or be inspired to know his reflections.

So the weary hours of that day passed, amidst hopes and fears, a deep and bitter anger, and an immeasurable disgust.

As evening came on, Dr. Siddons had left Hilda's bedside, and he and Lord Redman dined alone together. Lady Merton and Lady Gwendolen ate their meal in dreary solitude in the big dining-room, waited upon by domestics whose countenances bore traces of sorrow and anxiety, for Hilda was greatly beloved by all her husband's household.

Hilda was still in the same state, and Dr. Siddons determined to pass the night in the house, in case of any change for the worse taking place. Walter had ordered a room to be prepared for Lady Gwendolen also. He was sorry for the latter in her anxiety, and he remembered how Hilda had made excuses for her mother for the part she had taken. He reflected that, after all, Lady Gwendolen had honestly opposed her daughter's marriage, and had yielded at the advice of Lady Merton. He felt, however, that he could encounter neither Lady Merton nor his mother-in-law again that day, and the presence of Dr. Siddons afforded an excuse to the two men to dine alone together—an excuse which the doctor seized upon no less readily than did his host.

That night Walter lay down upon a couch in his dressing-room, which was close to his wife's room. He had fallen into a troubled sleep towards morning, worn out with anxiety and mental fatigue. He woke with a start to find Dr. Siddons standing beside him.

'Come!' the latter said to him hurriedly. 'Lady Redman must see you at once.'

He sprang from the sofa, and then he staggered a little.

'Is she worse?' he asked.

'She is terribly excited, and I fear it may make her

worse. She had been sleeping quietly enough, but she woke with a start, and is asking repeatedly for you. She may be more quiet when she has seen you.'

They entered Hilda's room together.

'Here is your husband, Lady Redman,' said Dr. Siddons gently.

Walter went to her side and knelt down by the bed.

'I am here, Hilda,' he said. 'What is it, dear?'

She looked at him with wild, frightened eyes.

'Walter!' she exclaimed, 'stay with me! Why did you leave me? I thought they had taken you away from me——'

'Who could do that, dearest? You have been asleep and dreaming.'

A slight shiver shook her. Dr. Siddons looked at her narrowly.

She groped feebly for her husband's hand, and held it in hers.

'Yes,' she said eagerly; 'it was a dream—nothing but a dream; but it frightened me, Walter. They said you were lost—and the child—— What did they mean when they said I had done it? That was not a dream; he told me so—Father Galsworthy. But it isn't true, Walter—tell me that it isn't true!'

'Hilda, it is a lie! Do you understand? It is a damnable lie!'

The words rang out and resounded through the room. The nurse shrank back, and Dr. Siddons laid his finger on his lips with a warning gesture.

Hilda looked at him; her face flushed, and she smiled.

'I knew, Walter—I knew——' she said.

The colour in her face faded away, to be replaced by

a deadly pallor. She lay motionless, her eyes, which a moment before had been full of feverish brilliancy, still open, and fixed upon her husband's face.

'She is going!' exclaimed the nurse, in a hushed voice.

Dr. Siddons bent over the bed.

'Lady Redman,' he said, in a loud and authoritative voice, leaning over her until his mouth nearly touched her ear—'Lady Redman, you must rouse yourself! Do you hear me? *You must!* Your husband wants you.' And then he shook her.

A moment of breathless suspense followed his sudden action. Then Hilda's face quivered slightly and her lips parted in a faint sigh.

'Hilda!'

A gleam of recognition stole into Hilda's eyes, and very slowly a suspicion of colour returned to her face.

Dr. Siddons made a rapid sign to the nurse, and took a glass from her hand.

'Swallow!' he said imperiously, holding it to Hilda's lips.

Gradually her consciousness returned to her. Walter felt the failing hand within his own tremble, and then he became sensible of a slight pressure. Dr. Siddons had laid his fingers on her other wrist.

Presently she turned her head a little, and then she spoke, but so faintly that Walter had to lean over her till their faces almost touched, in order to catch her words.

'You want me, Walter?'

'Yes, I want you.'

'I heard someone tell me. I was sleepy——'

She lay quiet for a short time, and then her eyes closed.

Walter looked at Dr. Siddons—a look of agonized uncertainty.

'Do not move!' the latter said in a low voice.

A few minutes passed, and then he motioned the nurse away from the bed and lifted his touch from Hilda's pulse.

'Let her feel your hand in hers when she awakes,' he whispered to Lord Redman.

CHAPTER XII

In the beginning of August Mrs. Russell paid her promised visit to Lady Merton at Ware. The Russells were in the habit of taking an annual holiday from their parochial duties at Abbotsbury for six weeks or so towards the end of summer, and the Rector had no difficulty in finding some hard-worked brother divine who was delighted to take the Sunday services at Abbotsbury for that period, and exchange the responsibilities of a thickly populated town parish for the lighter labours of a country cure.

Lady Merton had of course felt herself obliged to invite Mr. Russell as well as his wife to spend a few days at Ware. The Rector, however, had excused himself, feeling, possibly, that his position as an Anglican clergyman in a Roman Catholic house would be somewhat invidious, and that his acceptance of the invitation would be embarrassing to its donor and to himself. It had been arranged, therefore, that Mary Russell was to go by herself to Ware for a few days, and that she should join the Rector in the Isle of Wight at the conclusion of her visit.

The news of Lady Redman's premature confinement had been received with genuine sorrow and consternation at Abbotsbury, and both Mr. and Mrs. Russell were surprised at the feeling shown by all classes in the

neighbourhood when it became known that Hilda was dangerously ill. It was a revelation to them how completely she had succeeded, in the space of a few months, in winning the affection and esteem of all the people at Abbotsbury and for many miles round it.

Perhaps Mr. Russell was not altogether sorry that the child had been stillborn. He could not reconcile himself to the idea of Abbotsbury passing into Roman Catholic hands, and he remembered that should the present owner of it have no son, the title and estates would devolve, at the latter's death, on the son of his predecessor in the living, Walter Redman's first cousin. The Rector had reminded his wife of this fact, and, while honestly praying that Lady Redman might recover, had pointed out that it would be, after all, very much to the advantage of Abbotsbury if she were to have no children, or, at any rate, no sons.

Mr. Russell had thought his wife rather unresponsive on the subject; indeed, he felt rather ashamed of having alluded to it when poor Hilda was lying so ill, and suspected that Mary thought him unfeeling for doing so. It was very natural, he reflected, that she should sympathize with Lady Redman in the latter's disappointment. The Russells themselves had no children, and Mr. Russell knew that the fact was a great sorrow to his wife, and thought that it doubtless made her more ready to feel for Hilda. During the last few months he had noticed that she hardly ever spoke of the misfortune of her cousin's wife being a Roman Catholic, as she had formerly been so ready to do. Occasionally he had reminded her half laughingly of her idea that he should be the means of converting Hilda from Roman Catholicism to Anglicanism, but

Mary Russell had answered him that she thought such things were best left alone. She had entertained the idea, she explained, when they neither of them knew Hilda, and had thought that she might be a person who would attempt to make mischief at Abbotsbury. The Rector had been by no means ill-pleased that his wife's Protestantism should have moderated itself. Things were going on very well as they were, and he was fain to admit that Lady Redman was most scrupulous in never seeking to undermine the authority of the Rectory and the parish church in Abbotsbury, and that she appeared to regard her religion as a purely personal matter. Mr. Russell had congratulated himself more than once that the two houses should continue to be on such friendly terms as to make the fact of the mistress of the Hall being a Roman Catholic a mere accident, which he found himself able almost entirely to forget, and would probably have forgotten completely had it not been for the thought of the future, when the Catholic influence must infallibly impress itself upon the village and neighbourhood.

Mary Russell had never spoken to her husband of her conversations either with Lady Merton or with Walter Redman. She had, it is true, sometimes talked to him on the subject of the latter's scepticism, and had told him she felt convinced that Hilda would be much happier if she could feel that Walter was a conscientious believer in his own Church. This was a matter, however, in which Mr. Russell, much as he deplored it, knew himself to be powerless to interfere. Lord Redman had given him the living of Abbotsbury, but he had, at the same time, made Mr. Russell clearly understand that he placed him there to minister to the

spiritual needs of the Abbotsbury parishioners, and that though he, Walter Redman, should always support the Church, the Rector must not expect him to be what he would consider a Churchman. To do him justice, Mr. Russell had often suffered from scruples of conscience as to whether he were not sadly failing in his pastoral duties in making no effort to combat the scepticism of his principal parishioner, and he had at first attempted to speak to Lord Redman on the matter. Walter, however, was not a very easy person to approach on such questions. The Rector had found it impossible to induce him to talk on religious topics, or to betray any interest in them.

Walter's absolute indifference had baffled Mr. Russell. Had he ever shown signs of resentment, or of active opposition, the Rector would have considered it to be his duty to argue with him and to attempt to convince him; but when he found himself met, as he invariably had so found himself, by a good-humoured unconcern, he had been compelled to retire discomfited, and to tell his wife that he believed her cousin to be the re-incarnation of some pagan of old Greece. It was impossible, however, to pretend that Lord Redman's paganism was injurious to the moral welfare of Abbotsbury, and the Rector was sufficiently a man of the world to know that a constant attendance at church and an edifying frequentation of the Sacrament were quite compatible with lives very different from that led by the sceptical patron of his benefice.

Mr. Russell had no idea of the understanding which existed between his wife and Lady Merton, nor that the two were in frequent correspondence. The invitation to Ware had been cordially given when Lady Merton

had left Abbotsbury in January, and it had been an understood thing between the Rector and Mary Russell that the latter should accept it.

The events which had occurred since then had caused Lady Merton to be more anxious than ever that Mrs. Russell should come and stay with her, and when August came, Mr. Russell had taken himself and his bicycle off to the Isle of Wight, leaving his wife to pay her visit at Ware alone.

The late Lord Merton had left Ware to his widow for her lifetime, together with a large jointure to enable her to keep it up. At the time of her husband's death Lady Merton was still a Protestant, her conversion to Rome not taking place until three or four years afterwards. The Merton estates were large, and Ware was not the principal place belonging to the family. The latter had passed to Lady Merton's only son, who, together with his sister, the Duchess of Wearmouth, and another unmarried sister who preferred to live by herself, had resolutely declined to be convinced by his mother's arguments and those of the priests who she had hoped would convert them to her new faith.

Under Lady Merton's rule, Ware had become a great centre of Catholicism in England. The atmosphere was one of picturesque religion, but Lady Merton was careful to infuse into it a little worldly oxygen. It was by no means a Catholic house in the sense in which Cawarden and many others similar to the latter were Catholic houses. The taint of provincialism and restriction to a narrow and not-too-well-educated set was altogether absent from Ware. Its mistress was too much a woman of the world to tolerate the elimination of worldliness from her house. Her passion in life

being to bring souls into the Church, Lady Merton was clever enough to temper her Catholicism to her non-Catholic guests, and to allow the latter to find themselves in surroundings which were doubly attractive on account of an artistic blending of the vanities of this world with the most pleasing of the supposed attributes of the next.

At her parties at Ware, Lady Merton made a point of having a certain number of Protestants among the guests, and among these there was almost invariably a promising candidate for conversion. She prided herself upon the fact that the atmosphere of Ware had been the means of causing not a few to leave their Protestantism behind them when they had once breathed it.

She intended that Ware should represent a species of object-lesson to those without the Church who were invited to stay there. They were to feel themselves under the spell of a religion which would show them how mistaken they were in thinking Catholics to be eccentric sectarians who sought to make life dull and unlovely, and who were altogether unfashionable. In the foreground of the picture was all that the most fastidious worldling of either sex could require in a modern country-house. Indoors was luxury studied in all its details, pleasant and remarkable people, absolute liberty of conversation and ideas; out of doors was good shooting, properly organized, for the men, and other amusements, and both indoors and out a certain indefinable sense of ease and freedom from all stiffness which made Ware compare favourably with any country-house in the land as a place in which to pass a three or four days' visit pleasantly. But it was the background

of the picture which formed its chief attraction to the vast majority of Lady Merton's guests, Catholic and Protestant alike. The latter, indeed, were more struck by it than the former, as it was intended that they should be.

In this background, behind all the comfort, the luxury, and the pleasant worldliness, a sense of something not of this world—peaceful, serene, mysterious—asserted itself, as though some unseen Presence were in the house. In the midst of the talking and the laughter, or even breaking in upon the rattle of roulette balls, would sound the soft, deep tones of a church bell, and people would slip away quietly from the drawing-rooms and disappear for a while. Perhaps some of the Protestant members of the party would follow out of curiosity, and find themselves in the lofty, dimly-lighted chapel which Lady Merton had built at great cost, and filled with rare marbles and works of art brought from Italy and Spain. The lamp burning before the high altar shone like a red star in the dusk, and a faint, lingering scent of incense filled the air, for Lady Merton possessed the privilege of having the Host reserved in her chapel at Ware. A finely-wrought statue of Our Lady of Lourdes, with lighted tapers burning before it, stood out white and gleaming in the sanctuary. The silence was only broken by the murmur of a priest, the domestic chaplain, reciting a portion of the fifteen mysteries of the Rosary, and the voices of the kneeling worshippers repeating in quick monotony the latter part of the Paternoster and ten Hail Marys, which followed the recital of each Mystery.

The contrast between the brilliantly lighted drawing-rooms and the worldly occupations just left, and the

quiet, peaceful chapel, was great and almost startling. It impressed even those to whom such things said little. The actuality of the next world seemed to be brought suddenly and sharply into the carelessness of everyday life; the Known felt itself to be face to face with the Unknown, and everyone, worshipper or mere spectator, found himself confronted with the uncomfortable consciousness of his own mortality. A few minutes would pass, and the priest would disappear into the sacristy, the worshippers would silently leave the chapel and return to the drawing-rooms, and in some way or another the object-lesson would have had its effect.

Mrs. Russell found a very small party assembled at Ware on her arrival. It was, as Lady Merton had warned her, only a family gathering. Lady Gwendolen and her son were staying there, and one of Lady Merton's converts, Mrs. St. Leger, a middle-aged widow, with a devotion to St. Anthony of Padua and the Peerage. A young nephew of Lady Gwendolen's, who was studying for the priesthood, and an English monsignore from Rome, made up the party, and Mary Russell found herself the only member of it who was not a Catholic.

The cordiality of her welcome quickly removed any little embarrassment which Mrs. Russell might have felt at being, so to speak, an intruder. Lady Merton was an admirable hostess; she knew how to put people at once at their ease, and before Mary Russell had been an hour in the house she had been made to feel that she was a welcome guest.

Mrs. St. Leger devoted herself to Mary Russell from the first. She and Lady Merton were a great deal

together. She generally accompanied the latter to Rome, and assisted her in her entertaining in the Via Gregoriana. Mrs. St. Leger's reputation for piety was second only to that of Lady Merton herself. She had fashioned the raw material of many a convert, and shaped it preparatory to its receiving the finishing touches from Lady Merton's master-hand. This, indeed, was her humble mission in life, but, in the fulfilment of it, she moved, more especially in Rome, in social spheres which as a Protestant she had never hoped to enter. Somebody had once described Mrs. St. Leger as a religious *nouveau riche*, and her spiritual riches certainly obtained for her consideration and respect in the clerical world at Rome, while her intimacy with Lady Merton was accepted as a sufficient guarantee of her social position by the unsuspicious Romans, and by the English of the class in which Lady Merton's conversions were chiefly, though not entirely, made.

The week of Mary Russell's visit to Ware was a very hot one, and it was pleasanter to sit or stroll in the gardens after dinner than to remain in the house. Mrs. St. Leger attached herself to the new-comer on the first night of the latter's arrival, and the two walked about the garden together after dinner, while Lady Merton and the remainder of the party sat outside the open windows of the drawing-room. It was perfectly natural, under the circumstances, that their conversation should touch upon Abbotsbury and the Redmans. Mary Russell, indeed, was anxious to obtain news of Hilda. She had not seen the latter since her serious illness, neither had Hilda written more than a few lines, in which she told her that she

and Walter would not be returning to Abbotsbury until late in the autumn, as she was ordered by the doctors to go to the sea as soon as she should be well enough to leave London.

'Poor dear Lady Merton!' said Mrs. St. Leger with a sigh, as she and Mary Russell walked up and down in front of the house together. 'She is so unhappy about the Redmans! Lady Redman is quite her favourite grandchild, you know, Mrs. Russell.'

'But Hilda is making a very good recovery,' replied the latter.

'Ah yes, mercifully, so far as the body is concerned; but it is the state of her soul which is distressing dear Lady Merton so much. Would you believe it? Lady Redman has never been allowed to see her relatives alone since her illness. On the rare occasions when her mother and Lady Merton have been admitted to her room, either Lord Redman or a person whom the doctor insists on placing in charge of her has invariably been present. Even her spiritual director, Father Galsworthy, has not succeeded in having any private conversation with her.'

Mrs. Russell looked exceedingly astonished.

'What an extraordinary thing!' she exclaimed. 'What can be the reason of it? I am sure that Hilda—Lady Redman—would not have wished to be deprived of the society of her relations, and the consolation of seeing Father Galsworthy. I suppose Dr. Siddons is responsible for it.'

Mrs. St. Leger shook her head mysteriously.

'Of course,' she replied, 'that is the excuse which is given by Lord Redman.'

'I am sure that my cousin would not take such a

step unless the doctor had recommended it,' said Mary Russell.

Mrs. St. Leger sighed again.

'It is quite natural that you should think so,' she said, 'but——' and then she paused hesitatingly. 'It is rather a delicate matter to discuss with you, Mrs. Russell,' she continued; 'you and Lord Redman are relatives, and you cannot, of course, look at the question from Lady Merton's point of view.'

'I do not see why,' said Mary Russell.

'Oh, well, my dear Mrs. Russell, you are not one of us, you see. That makes all the difference. You cannot be expected to realize how great a sorrow it is to dear Lady Merton and to Lady Gwendolen to feel that Lady Redman is surrounded by anti-Catholic influences. This makes it very difficult to talk to you on the subject. I should not like to say anything which might hurt your feelings, for you and Lord Redman are both Protestants. You belong to the same Church, and you would naturally, therefore, sympathize with his action.'

'Not at all!' exclaimed Mary Russell warmly. 'You may regard my cousin Walter Redman and myself as belonging to the same Church, but I assure you, Mrs. St. Leger, that we hold very different views. My cousin is practically a free-thinker and I am an Anglican. If I thought that he were seeking to deprive his wife of the comforts of her religion, I should disapprove of his action quite as much as Lady Merton could do. I know, of course, that to you we are all free-thinkers, and that you Roman Catholics see no difference between us.'

Mrs. St. Leger smiled—a quiet, superior little smile.

'Yes,' she replied, 'in a sense you are right. To us Catholics those who are not within the Church are all free-thinkers. Your differences of opinion do not alter your position in our eyes. The most advanced Ritualists and the most confirmed agnostics are equally Protestants so far as we are concerned.'

Mary Russell did not answer immediately.

'But why should you think that my cousin has other motives for preventing his wife from seeing her relations in private than those which he has given?' she asked, after a pause. 'I have often noticed,' she added, 'how careful Walter is not to interfere with her religion in any way.'

'Ah!' replied Mrs. St. Leger, 'there are more insidious ways of undermining a person's faith than by open interference. I am afraid dear Lady Merton thinks that Lord Redman is taking advantage of his wife's affection for him, and is trying gradually to contaminate her with his own infidel ideas. I hear that Lady Redman is very unhappy, poor thing; but apparently, since her illness, she has not got the mental strength to shake herself free from the conspiracy of which she is a victim. But I ought not to talk of these things to you, Mrs. Russell; I am forgetting all the time that you are a Protestant.'

Mary Russell winced a little. Somehow the term 'Protestant' jarred upon her.

'I shall be very glad if you will talk to me about it,' she replied. 'I had no idea that things were as you describe them, and perhaps I could be of some use. My cousin and I have had several conversations together about his wife's unhappiness concerning his lack of faith. No doubt Lady Merton will have told you.'

'She told me that you were doing your best to awaken some religious belief in Lord Redman's heart,' said Mrs. St. Leger; 'but oh! dear Mrs. Russell, unless it is the true belief, what will it avail him?'

Mary Russell sighed.

'It all seems so plain and so simple to you who belong to what you are convinced is the only true Church,' she said. 'I envy the people who were born Roman Catholics.'

'Ah yes, indeed!' said Mrs. St. Leger. 'Converts like myself know how many a struggle with prejudice and error we have to undergo before the grace comes to us to discern the truth.'

'You became a Roman Catholic, then?' asked Mary Russell.

Mrs. St. Leger smiled.

'Yes,' she replied softly, with an upward glance. 'In His great mercy God opened my eyes to the truth and led me into His Church. I used to call myself, as you do, an Anglican. When I look back to those days, it seems incredible to me how I can have been so blinded. Ah!' she exclaimed, 'here is Lady Merton coming towards us. She will scold me for monopolizing your society, Mrs. Russell.'

They paused in their walk in order to allow Lady Merton to join them.

'What are you two in such deep conversation about?' she asked, smiling.

'I was giving Mrs. Russell some news of Lady Redman,' said Mrs. St. Leger. 'She had not heard of her for some little time.'

'So sad!' murmured Lady Merton, 'so very sad—poor dear Hilda!' and then she paused and looked at

Mrs. Russell. 'Has Mrs. St. Leger told you,' she continued, 'that neither my daughter nor myself has ever been allowed to see Hilda alone?'

'I cannot understand it,' said Mary Russell. 'Surely she is not so ill now as to make it necessary for her relations to be kept away from her?'

'She is making a wonderful recovery,' returned Lady Merton. 'The whole thing is preposterous,' she added, 'and Walter is behaving disgracefully! We have not the slightest doubt that her illness was entirely brought about by the distress of mind which he has made her suffer; and now, when she is weak and unable to assert herself, he has got that abominable doctor to tell her that she must not even see Father Galsworthy. Even the old priest at Cawarden, who has known her ever since she was born, was refused admittance. Gwendolen sent him to St. James's Square, and your cousin told him that Hilda was very sorry, but she was unable to receive him. Of course, all this is put into the poor child's head by those who are secretly working to estrange her from our holy religion.'

'Dear Lady Merton,' expostulated Mrs. St. Leger gently, 'remember that our friend here is a Protestant. She cannot be expected to understand our grief and indignation at the failure of Lord Redman to keep the promises he made when he married a Catholic.'

Lady Merton sighed.

'That is very true, Emily,' she said. 'I beg your pardon, my dear Mrs. Russell,' she added; 'I should have remembered that you are not a Catholic. You cannot understand how jealously we are obliged to guard our faith from contamination in this Protestant country. As you know,' she continued, 'I was always

opposed to this marriage between your cousin and Hilda. I do not approve of mixed marriages. But I and all of us were misled by Lord Redman's apparent honesty of purpose. I must say that I always felt uneasy about the future. I do not want to offend you, dear Mrs. Russell, but I have known so many instances in which your co-religionists have broken their promises after marriage with a Catholic, and have tried to evade the obligations into which they had to enter in order to obtain the sanction of the Church to their union. Emily,' continued Lady Merton, turning to Mrs. St. Leger, 'go back and amuse the others like a good creature. Mrs. Russell and I will rejoin you presently.'

Mrs. St. Leger retraced her steps obediently towards the house. Lady Merton looked after her with a benevolent little smile.

'Such a pious soul!' she said in an undertone to her companion. 'Like yourself, Mrs. Russell, she used to be very much prejudiced against the Church, but now she is a fervent Catholic. She has a great devotion to St. Anthony of Padua. It is truly marvellous how many graces he has obtained for her.'

CHAPTER XIII

'IT is a great pity that the child did not live,' said Mary Russell when Mrs. St. Leger had left them. 'It would have been a bond of union between Walter and Hilda. I am sure Walter would have kept his word, and that he would have made no difficulties about its religious training.'

'I wish I could think that they would both look upon what has happened as a sign of Almighty God's displeasure,' replied Lady Merton. 'Hilda, I am convinced, must feel it to be so. I had hoped so much from your influence with her, dear Mrs. Russell! Your letters were a sad disappointment both to Gwendolen and myself.'

'Hilda made it impossible to me to speak about her husband,' said Mary Russell. 'After all,' she continued, 'you must remember that I am not a Catholic, Lady Merton. Just before you joined us Mrs. St. Leger was saying that you Catholics recognise no difference between believing and unbelieving Protestants. To you we are all in the same category. No doubt Hilda considers that if her husband is not a Catholic, it matters little whether he is a believer in his own Church or not. I can only account for the way in which she met my attempts to induce her to try and make him believe in something by assuming that she feels this.'

Lady Merton paused for a moment before replying.

'Emily St. Leger is a very devoted Catholic,' she observed. 'I often tell her that she is a little too uncompromising in her judgment upon people who are outside the Church. She cannot distinguish between those who are wilfully blind to the truth and those who, conscientiously searching for it, only lack the grace to discern it. I do not suppose for a moment that Hilda would not listen to you because you are a Protestant. I wish I could think so—it would be more excusable.'

Mary Russell looked a little offended.

'Yes, my dear,' continued Lady Merton, 'it would be more excusable from our point of view. It would be a proof that Hilda refused to be satisfied with anything less than her husband's conversion to the Church, and that she would countenance no attempt to make him believe in any form of religion but the true one.'

'But you told me at Abbotsbury that she would be content to feel that Walter had any religious faith,' said Mrs. Russell.

'Quite true, my dear,' replied Lady Merton. 'I did say so, and at that time both her mother and I thought it. Of course we should prefer to see Walter Redman a Catholic; it would be absurd to pretend that we should not. As this seemed to be impossible, so far as our human foresight could judge, it would have been at least some consolation to think that he was a conscientious Protestant, and this is what we felt sure that Hilda most earnestly desired. It was for this reason that we sought your help—as a Protestant.'

'It was not of much use,' said Mary Russell.

'No, and this is what distresses us all so much,'

replied Lady Merton. 'Now that we are alone together,' she continued, 'I can explain to you what I mean. Unfortunately, we have too much reason to suspect that Hilda is allowing herself to become indifferent to her husband's spiritual welfare. At one time, as I told you at Abbotsbury in the winter, her letters were full of misgivings and anxiety about him. She used to declare that she should be happy if only she could feel that he was a true member of your creed. By degrees, however, other influences have gained the mastery over her, and she is sacrificing everything to these.'

'What influences?' asked Mary Russell.

Lady Merton cast down her eyes.

'Oh, my dear,' she said, 'I hardly like to tell you. I fear—well, I fear that Hilda is becoming a slave to her carnal love for her husband. They are perfectly happy together—in this sense of the word "happiness"—and she has ceased to wish for anything higher. It is a state of moral apathy from which nothing can rouse her. It is so clear to me that this terrible confinement has been sent by God in His mercy in order to make her reflect and repent. And now, at the very time when she might listen to advice, your cousin has practically isolated her from all her own belongings. Can you wonder that we are distressed, Mrs. Russell?' she concluded, sighing.

'But this state of things cannot last, dear Lady Merton,' replied Mary Russell. 'Hilda wrote to me some time ago to say that she was getting much stronger, and that she hoped, after a few weeks by the sea, to be quite herself again. It would be impossible for Walter to continue to separate her from Lady

Gwendolen and you when once she is well. When they return to Abbotsbury I shall certainly do my best to speak both to her and to Walter. He and I have had more than one conversation together, as I told you.'

'Yes,' answered Lady Merton. 'I remember that you wrote to me about it. You will not think me indiscreet, I hope, if I ask you whether anything which he said gave you the impression that he distrusted Hilda's family?'

Mary Russell hesitated.

'Distrust—no,' she replied. 'But——'

'I hope you will be open with me, dear Mrs. Russell,' said Lady Merton gently. 'You need not be afraid of quoting your cousin's words. I am sure that you are as anxious as we are that all should go well with him and Hilda, and I think that, should Walter have taken any unjust ideas into his head, you are probably the person who will best be able to remove them.'

'Well,' answered Mary Russell, 'I am afraid Walter thinks that in some way his wife is being worried and made unhappy over her religion. I think he suspects the Dominican Father at Abbotsbridge, to whom Hilda used, I believe, to go to confession, of unnecessarily disturbing her mind.'

Lady Merton laughed softly.

'It is so funny,' she said, 'the absurd ideas which Protestants get hold of about us! We do not go to confession in order to have our peace of mind disturbed, but in order to regain it when we have lost it. But your cousin need not hold us responsible for what Hilda may have been told at Abbotsbridge,' she added, with a quick glance at Mrs. Russell. 'It is quite possible that this Dominican may have spoken to her

seriously if he believed that she was not acting up to her duty. Some priests are over-zealous occasionally, and Dominicans are apt to be severe.'

'It was very evident that something was troubling Hilda,' replied Mary Russell. 'She used to go over to Abbotsbridge very frequently, and Walter thought that she always looked more worried after her visits there.'

'And, of course, concluded that her religion was to blame for it,' said Lady Merton. 'It was perfectly natural that she should be troubled, dear Mrs. Russell. Her conscience was perpetually reproaching her for allowing considerations of her worldly happiness to interfere with what she knew to be her responsibilities towards her husband's spiritual welfare. Her letters to us showed very plainly the state of her mind. Lord Redman, of course, has never been able to realize that, to a Catholic, duty towards the Church supersedes all other calls. He has been disappointed and mortified to find that Hilda's religion has so much hold over her, and now, under the plea of her health, he is striving to prevent its influence from reaching her.'

At this moment the bell of the chapel interrupted their conversation, and Lady Merton turned towards the house.

'We always have prayers at ten o'clock,' she explained, as she led the way into the drawing-room, where the others had preceded them.

After a minute or two everybody moved towards the chapel. Mary Russell hung back and opened one of the books lying upon a little table. Her hostess had not invited her to accompany them, and she hardly knew whether it would not be resented were she to do so unasked.

'Will you not join us, Mrs. Russell?' said a soft voice at her elbow; and, turning round, Mary Russell saw Mrs. St. Leger standing by her side.

'I do not know,' she began hesitatingly. 'Will not Lady Merton be surprised at seeing me?'

Mrs. St. Leger smiled.

'Dear Lady Merton!' she said. 'She is much too absorbed in her devotions to notice who comes and who stays away! I am sure she would wish you to join us, if you feel inclined to do so.'

Mary Russell followed her to the chapel and knelt on one of the cushioned chairs while Lady Merton's chaplain recited a portion of the Rosary. The quiet devotion of the scene impressed her, and she found herself wondering how it was that Roman Catholics were able to make their religion so completely a part of their everyday life. It all appeared to be so natural and so unstrained; and she could not help thinking of the Rector's attempts to induce his parishioners at Abbotsbury to come to church on other occasions than those of the orthodox Sunday services, and the difficulties and heart-burnings which resulted from them.

In a few minutes all was over, and they returned to the drawing-room together. Lady Merton was the first to rise from her knees, and her eyes rested for a moment on Mary Russell as she passed her. She made no comment, however, to Mrs. Russell afterwards on the fact of the latter having been present; and Mary thought that, as Mrs. St. Leger had said would be case, she had not noticed she was there.

'The chapel is very pretty, is it not?' Mrs. St. Leger said to her as they sat down on a sofa in the drawing-room.

'Yes; it must be a great pleasure to have so beautiful a chapel in the house.'

'And the inestimable privilege of being allowed to reserve the Blessed Sacrament there,' added Mrs. St. Leger. 'The concession was specially granted to dear Lady Merton from Rome. I wonder if you feel the mysterious influence of that Holy Presence? I suppose not,' she added pensively. 'I suppose that you are too much separated from us to be able to feel it as we do.'

'How long have you been a Roman Catholic, Mrs. St. Leger?' asked Mary Russell.

'I became a Catholic five years ago,' replied Mrs. St. Leger; 'but it seems to me as though I had never been anything else. The old days seem as if they formed part of the life of another person. I cannot realize that I was once a Protestant.'

'It must require great courage to take such a step,' said Mrs. Russell thoughtfully.

'I do not think so. When once conviction comes, the claims of the Church become so clear, her summons so imperative, that it would require far greater courage to refuse to listen to her voice.'

'Since I have learned more about your religion and read some of your books on the subject, I often envy you all. It must be so comfortable to feel that you belong to an infallible Church—that you have no individual responsibility beyond obedience to the precepts of that Church. How different it is with us in the Anglican communion! We have no infallible counsellor to whom we can turn for advice in our spiritual doubts and difficulties.'

Mrs. St. Leger smiled.

'But, my dear Mrs. Russell,' she replied, 'you Protestants are by way of not requiring any such infallible guide and counsellor. You have God, you say, to whom you can turn, and you ignore the fact that He constituted a Church which was to speak in His name, and by His authority.'

'We claim to be a branch of that Church.'

'No doubt. But can you prove your claim? You know that we Catholics do not admit it. The Holy Father has pronounced against the validity of your Orders, thereby demolishing the last support upon which that claim could logically rest.'

'What would my position be, as the wife of an Anglican priest, if I accepted that decision?' asked Mary Russell.

Lady Merton approached them at this moment, and overheard her question.

'What decision?' she asked, smiling. 'I hope,' she added, 'that Emily has not been talking theology to you, Mrs. Russell?'

'The decision of the Vatican regarding our Anglican Orders,' replied Mary Russell. 'I was asking Mrs. St. Leger what my position would be if I believed that the Pope was right.'

'Your position,' said Lady Merton slowly, 'would be exactly the same as it was before.'

'But my husband——'

'My dear, you married your husband because he was a man, not because he was a priest. The Pope's decision cannot unsex him.'

Mrs. Russell laughed in spite of herself.

'I have never looked at the matter in that light,' she answered.

'I do not know what you and Emily were discussing,' returned Lady Merton, sitting down by them. 'I am only supposing the case that you accepted the decision as to the invalidity of the Anglican Orders, and, therefore, could no longer believe Mr. Russell to be a true priest.'

'It would be a terrible position.'

'I do not see why. It is a position in which many have found themselves of recent years.'

'A wife must believe in her husband,' said Mary Russell.

'Certainly!' replied Lady Merton. 'It is very much better when she is able to do so; but she is not bound to believe in his errors. Besides,' she added, 'when a person has once accepted the teaching of the Church on any point of doctrine or faith, no mere worldly consideration can be taken into account. Our Lord says distinctly that all earthly ties, even those between parents and children, must be severed if they interfere with the desire to follow Him. Well, my dear, we Catholics know that there is only one way by which He can surely be followed, and that is by the path which His Church points out to us. If we deliberately refuse to take that way, we lose ourselves and grope blindly after the truth, ever straying more widely from it.'

Mrs. St. Leger sighed.

'Dear Lady Merton!' she exclaimed, 'it is so true! Your words bring back to me the time when I, too, was losing my way. Who knows whether, but for you, I should not have lost it irretrievably?'

'I was an instrument, Emily,' murmured Lady Merton —'only an instrument. No one knows better than myself the difficulties and uncertainties through which Protes-

tants have to pass before the final moment of conviction comes. But when it does come, the whole glorious fact seems to reveal itself in a flash. The darkest places in the doubting mind are illumined, and our doubts themselves shrivel up and disappear under the searching radiance of the Divine truth.'

Mary Russell sat and listened in silence. Nothing in Catholicism impressed her so much as the strong, undoubting faith which its members displayed in their Church, and the calm, tranquil conviction with which they regarded that Church as the sole exponent upon earth of the Divine will and authority. She felt that if she were once persuaded of the truth of the claim of Rome to be the one and only legitimate repository of that authority, she would be able to accept all the doctrines of the Roman Church which had formerly appeared to her to be so anti-spiritual and superstitious.

The antagonism which she had entertained against the Church of Rome had given Mrs. Russell a keen interest in Roman Catholicism, and this interest had been enhanced by the accident of having been brought into almost daily intercourse with a member of that communion. The books which, at Mary's special request, Hilda Redman had lent her, had aroused in her an eager desire to learn more of a religious system which she had once so thoroughly despised. Beyond the limited occupations which her husband's parish afforded, life at Abbotsbury was a little aimless. The cares and duties of the mother of a family had been denied to Mary Russell, and she disliked dogs. The sudden introduction of a Roman Catholic element into her surroundings had undoubtedly supplied her with a

fresh interest in life, and, little by little, this interest had become very engrossing. Perhaps not the least fascinating part of it was the feeling that the subject to a clergyman's wife was, or should be, forbidden; though it is doubtful whether Mary Russell was more than dimly conscious that she was influenced to a certain extent by that attraction which forbidden fruit has for each of us.

She had long ceased to discuss Roman Catholicism with the Rector, and the latter had no idea that his wife had been diligently reading every book dealing with the subject from the Catholic point of view which she had been able to obtain. The two or three volumes which Hilda had lent her had merely been, as it were, the gate through which she had entered into the field of Catholic controversial literature. She had sent for many of the works referred to in them, and in their pages had found confutation of all her most cherished prejudices, and more than a hundred and one plain reasons for joining the Church of Rome. The Rector of Abbotsbury never knew how much unorthodox literature lay hidden among the books in his wife's sitting-room. At first, in the days when she still talked about Romanists, Mr. Russell used to wonder how she knew so much about their tenets, and would conclude that her obviously extended knowledge was the result of her friendship with Lady Redman. By degrees, however, as Mary Russell pursued her studies, she experienced an ever-increasing difficulty and reluctance in discussing religious topics with her husband. She secreted her books more carefully than before, and this reticence and secrecy became something in the nature of an excitement—a feature in her otherwise prosaic life at

Abbotsbury which gradually brought a new note and colour into it.

'Ah!' she exclaimed, as Lady Merton finished speaking, 'it is all so easy for you who have the conviction that your Church is the only true one. If I were convinced——' she added, and then she stopped short. 'But I do not want to be convinced,' she said, after a pause. 'It is all very well for people who can join your Church without distressing others who depend upon them.'

Lady Merton and Mrs. St. Leger looked at her curiously and then at one another.

'My dear,' said the former gently, 'we have no right to place other people's prejudices before the salvation of our own souls. If you are ever genuinely convinced of the truth, you will realize that no such considerations can be allowed to stand in the way of obedience to the voice of the Church. You are thinking of your husband, of course, and it is very natural that you should do so. Now, I am putting a merely hypothetical case. Supposing you became convinced that you and he were members of a false Church; would you allow consideration for his feelings to stand in the way of your attempting to save yourself and him from such a perilous position? Would it not be your clear duty to set him the example of casting off your false religion in the hope that he might follow you?'

'You do not know James,' replied Mary Russell. 'He is devoted to his profession and to his Church. I have never dared to tell him how much my views concerning the Roman Church have been modified of late. He thinks me a staunch Protestant, even more convinced than he of the errors of Roman Catholicism.

He would never get over it were I to become a Catholic.'

Lady Merton smiled indulgently.

'Oh yes, my dear, he would,' she replied. 'We are all given to magnifying the obstacles in our path. It would be a shock to him at first, of course; but when once your conversion (I am only supposing such a thing, remember) was an accomplished fact, he would become reconciled to it. It is always wiser not to talk about these things till they are done. Discussion before the final step is taken is only unsettling to the convert and painful to his or her Protestant belongings. However, we will talk about this some other time. It is getting late, and I dare say you are tired after your hot journey to-day. There is only one thing I should like to say, dear Mrs. Russell, and that is, pray go to the chapel whenever you like. It is never closed, and I am sure you will find help and comfort there, if you are in need of either. Nobody will notice or disturb you.'

Mrs. St. Leger murmured a gentle and sympathetic 'Good-night' as the ladies went upstairs. Mrs. Russell had to pass the door of the chapel on her way to her room. It was partly open, and she paused and looked into it. The light of two or three candles burning in front of the statue of Our Lady of Lourdes, and the red lamp glowing before the Blessed Sacrament, scarcely illumined the gloom of the building. Mary could dimly discern shadowy forms kneeling in silent prayer before the altar. The peace and the stillness of it seemed to force themselves on her attention and to hold her imagination. There was peace and stillness in the old church at Abbotsbury also, but here surely dwelt

the shadow of some mysterious Presence—the invisible Dispenser of a sweet and holy calm.

The sound of a door opening softly above caused her to look upward, and Lady Merton and Mrs. St. Leger, with veils thrown over their heads, came into a small gallery in the sanctuary and kneeled silently. For a moment Mary Russell felt impelled to enter the chapel, and then, with a quick sigh, she turned and went thoughtfully to her own room.

CHAPTER XIV

It was late in October before Lord and Lady Redman returned to Abbotsbury. Hilda had quite recovered her health, and appeared at the same time to have regained her natural good spirits. After six weeks spent in the bracing air of the Yorkshire coast she and Walter had gone to the north of Scotland, where the latter had rented a shooting-lodge and some salmon-fishing. The house was very small, and, indeed, they had chosen it for this very reason. There had been sufficient sport to occupy Walter and one or two of his friends, and the dearth of spare bedrooms in the lodge prevented any possibility of Hilda being obliged to receive members of her own family who might otherwise have proposed a visit.

The complete change of scene, and the out-of-door life which she had been able to lead in the Highlands during the earlier part of the autumn, had done much towards insuring Hilda's complete recovery; but another agent had been at work, which was at least as powerful as either of the others, for it had reacted upon her mind, and hence upon her nerves, which had suffered keenly during the weeks which had immediately preceded her confinement.

Hilda felt that the barrier which had existed between her husband and herself had collapsed and vanished.

The confession which fear and pain combined had wrung from her as to the pressure which had been brought to bear upon her by her relatives and by her spiritual directors had resulted in breaking the ice of that reserve which both she and Walter had deemed it their duty to each other to maintain on all matters connected with their respective religious beliefs. As if by mutual consent, they had tacitly released one another from the promise made at their engagement. The effect on Hilda had been very marked. The knowledge that there was no longer a subject which could not be mentioned between her and Walter seemed to complete her happiness. She determined that he should see for himself that she had no intention of attempting to convert him to Catholicism. During the long hours of recovery from her illness she had thought deeply and earnestly, and Walter, as Mr. Shirley had advised him to do, had let her think.

The result had been a firm resolution on Hilda's part not to allow her relatives to interfere between her husband and herself. If he were to be brought into the Church, she told herself that it should b through the action of love, but not through the intrigues of man. It was not, she had now convinced herself, the anxiety to save Walter's soul that troubled Lady Merton and the priests, but the desire to secure a prominent convert to the Church. But they had gone too far in their endeavours to work upon her fears for the future, and Hilda determined that she would leave the future to God. Walter had told her of the attempt made to introduce a religious into her sick-room, and of the difficulty which he and Dr. Siddons had in preventing her relations from forcing their presence upon

her. The letters which she had received during her convalescence from Lady Merton and from her mother had been full of bitter reproaches for her unnatural conduct in consenting that they should be kept at a distance from her, and Lady Merton especially implored her to take to heart the solemn warning of His displeasure with which Almighty God had visited her. Hilda showed the letters to her husband. That she felt herself able to do so was a proof in itself of the difference which had taken place in their mutual relations so far as the discussing of religious matters was concerned.

Walter Redman had said very little after reading the letters; he had already had ample opportunity of forming his own conclusions as to the tactics which had been pursued in order to compass his conversion, and he refrained from uttering a word to his wife which would seem to hold her faith responsible for the dishonesty and worldliness of those who professed to be acting in accordance with its maxims.

He had been much struck, indeed, by the fact that, notwithstanding all that Hilda had passed through at the hands of her Church, and her evident pain and disgust at the part which had been played by her family and their clerical advisers, her belief in her religion remained unshaken. She had said to him repeatedly that the Church was not responsible for the sayings and doings of those who were over-zealous in its cause, and Walter thought he detected in his wife an almost nervous eagerness that he should not imagine she blamed her religion for all which had been done in its name.

It was very evident to both of them that after their

return to Abbotsbury it would be impossible to prevent Lady Gwendolen from visiting her daughter. Hilda had felt the separation from her mother very acutely, but she knew well enough that the latter was entirely under Lady Merton's influence, and would certainly continue her propaganda should she be allowed to be with her. Walter had implored her to be firm, and to decline Lady Gwendolen's suggestion that the latter should accompany her to Filey and remain with her while he was shooting in Scotland. The knowledge that she was no longer obliged to keep her thoughts locked up in her own heart, but could now talk freely with her husband, caused Hilda to feel almost indifferent to the prospect of future remonstrances and pious lectures on the part of her mother and Lady Merton. She felt that it was beyond their power to terrify her any more by their pictures of the future misery which was awaiting her and those dear to her. Even Father Galsworthy, she said to herself, would be unable to overawe her by his threats and expostulations. The spell of superstition had broken down under the calm and quiet reasoning of the past few weeks; a twofold strength had come to her, for she knew that she was no longer to fight a spiritual fight single-handed.

Both Hilda and her husband were delighted to find themselves back at Abbotsbury once more, and the autumn and winter months were to be devoted to the entertaining of a succession of shooting-parties. Hilda was naturally fond of society, and she looked forward to seeing her friends at Abbotsbury after so many months of enforced retirement. The people of the place welcomed them back with a genuine heartiness, for the news of Hilda's illness had been received with

sorrow and dismay by all classes in the district round Abbotsbury. From no one did Hilda receive a warmer greeting than from Mr. Russell. The Rector had rapidly grown both to like and esteem Lady Redman. At the time of her illness many instances of her thoughtful kindness to the poor and the ailing, not only at Abbotsbury, but also at Trentford and more distant places, came to his ears, and he had reproached himself somewhat severely for his narrow-mindedness in having been inclined to regard her coming to Abbotsbury as a misfortune.

Mr. Russell had been a little surprised that his wife did not respond so cordially to his praises of Lady Redman as he had expected her to do. He had noticed of late that when he mentioned Hilda's name she had spoken of her with an almost disapproving air, and he wondered what the reason for it might be.

'I consider that Hilda is strangely careless of her duty towards Walter,' she had said to the Rector a day or two before the Redmans' return home. 'Her utter indifference to his atheism is shocking, especially in a Catholic. I know that her mother and all her family are greatly distressed at the callous way in which she accepts what ought to be so great a sorrow to her.'

Lord and Lady Redman had not been at the Hall many days before it became evident that the intimacy which had existed during the previous winter between the latter and Mary Russell was not taken up exactly where it had been left. Hilda herself was certainly not to blame for this. She had gone over to the Rectory the day after her arrival at Abbotsbury, and it had struck her that, though the Rector's welcome was cordial enough, that of his wife was somewhat cold.

Mr. Russell had innocently alluded to his wife having stayed with Lady Merton in the course of the conversation, and had politely expressed his regret at not having been able to accompany her. To Hilda's surprise, Mary Russell had looked somewhat embarrassed at the mention of the visit, and had rather abruptly begun to talk on some other topic. Hilda thought it strange that neither Mrs. Russell nor Lady Merton should ever have alluded to the fact of the former having been to Ware in their letters to her, and that evening at dinner she mentioned it to her husband.

Walter did not attach any particular importance to the matter. He had never told his wife of the conversations which he and Mary Russell had together before her illness. Mary had begged him not to do so, and, believing that Hilda had confided in her, he had judged it to be wiser not to let the former suppose that Mrs. Russell talked to him of what she might have said.

As a matter of fact, Walter Redman had pondered very deeply over some of his cousin's words. Until Mary Russell had told him so, it had never struck him that Hilda might resent his silence as to his religious ideas and opinions as a want of confidence in his wife, and the thought that she might be mortified and hurt at his reticence on such matters had perhaps left more impression on his mind than Mrs. Russell had calculated would be the case.

'I think that Mary is a little offended with me,' said Hilda that evening at dinner. Walter and she were alone together. The following day some guests were coming to stay with them, and, among others, Lady Gwendolen Cawarden was to be of the party.

'Why should she be so?' asked Walter.

'I have no idea. Unless it is because I have not written to her very often since we have been away. Mr. Russell was very friendly this morning, and he looked quite pleased to see me, but I thought Mary's manner was a little stiff.'

'Russell is a good chap,' said Lord Redman, 'as long as he don't preach; then he is apt to be exceedingly tiresome.'

Hilda laughed.

'I don't believe you know anything about it, Walter,' she said. 'I expect you are generally asleep during the sermons, on the rare occasions when you make up your mind to go to church.'

Walter looked at her and laughed also.

'I'm afraid that is true,' he replied. 'Do you know, Hilda,' he continued, 'I am going to be very virtuous this winter. I expect church-going is a habit—very much like cleaning one's teeth. I think I shall try and get into it, and then, perhaps, it will not seem to be such a waste of time.'

'You might try it, certainly,' said Hilda indifferently, though there was laughter in her eyes. 'Your teeth have not suffered from the habit of cleaning them, I imagine,' she added.

'I believe not,' replied Walter gravely. 'Perhaps,' he continued hesitatingly, 'you would take me with you to Abbotsbridge sometimes?'

The smile died out of Hilda's eyes, and an uneasy expression came into them.

'I do not intend to go to church at Abbotsbridge any more,' she answered. 'I shall go into Trentford instead.'

'Take me to Trentford, then.'

Hilda looked at him.

'No, Walter, I will not,' she said decidedly. 'You have your own church here, and it is much better for all the people about that you should attend it. If you came with me, everybody would say that I was trying to convert you.'

'And would they not be right?'

'No, they would not! you know that they would not, Walter. Shall I tell you something?' she added. 'I used to think how thankful and happy I should be if I could be the means of influencing you, and of making you become a Catholic.'

She paused for a moment and looked at her husband earnestly.

'And now?' he asked gently——

'Now,' replied Hilda, 'I have learned to hate the word "influence." I do not think that you will ever become a Catholic; but if you do, it shall be through no influence of mine.'

Walter looked at her in surprise.

'Who else should influence me?'

'God.'

'Everything is put upon God's shoulders,' answered Walter.

'Yes, I know,' returned Hilda hurriedly; 'that is what is so canting; but I mean God's influence really, not the human influence working for human motives which is hypocritically attributed to Him in order to conceal its true nature. That is why I have learned to hate the word as applied to conversions. It means the discovering of a weak place in the character of the convert, and playing upon that weakness in the name

of God for motives with which God has nothing to do.'

'And you would not play upon my weak point?' said Walter Redman, smiling.

'Your weak point!' repeated Hilda. 'I do not know——'

'Dear,' he interrupted softly, 'I think that you know very well.'

Hilda was silent for a moment.

'And if I do,' she said presently, 'I am all the more determined never to attempt to influence your religious opinions. If God wants you to be a Catholic, Walter, you will be one without any human interference.'

'What would Lady Merton say to such a sentiment?'

'Oh,' replied Hilda, 'you know what she would say; but you must remember that she considers herself to have an especial calling to make converts. You must not think that we are all like my grandmother.'

'I assure you that I do not!' answered Walter, smiling a little at his wife's eagerness. 'I think the mania for convert-making is almost a peculiarity of you English Catholics, and no doubt it is very natural that it should be so. I have known plenty of foreign Catholics, but I have not found this mania among them. In England I have noticed that it exists chiefly among the elderly women and the priests, and the young men who have been converted themselves. I have always regarded it as another example of the egoism of religion.'

'And why so?' asked Hilda.

Lord Redman shrugged his shoulders.

'You know the fable of the fox who lost his brush,' he replied. 'When a person is converted to another

religion, he has to try his best not to be thought a fool by his former co-religionists, and the latter are annoyed with him because it is evident that he considers them to be fools.'

Hilda laughed. Since she and her husband had discussed such topics together she had become accustomed to his satirical remarks. It was not to be wondered at, she thought, if strangers and casual acquaintances regarded him as a sceptic in matters of religious faith.

'At any rate you can't think me a fool, Walter,' she observed quietly.

Walter Redman glanced at her appreciatively. It was satisfactory to live with a woman who had a sense of humour.

'You are not a convert,' he replied, lighting a cigarette. 'Then you will not take me to church with you at Trentford?' he added.

'No,' replied Hilda, smiling, 'I will not. Do you think it very odd of me? I should be very thankful if you and I were both of the same faith; but I do not want you to become a Catholic from any other motive than a genuine conviction of the truth of Catholicism. Do you know what the one question is which I have invariably heard asked about a convert? "Who has converted him?" I have always noticed that the answer is never that which it surely ought to be. It is never "God."'

There was no levity in Walter Redman's glance, or in the tone of his voice as he answered her.

'What has made you think of these things?' he said.

'I have had plenty of time for thinking lately,' replied Hilda; 'and if you were ever to become a

Catholic, I should like the reply to the question which would inevitably be asked as to who converted you to be "God." I would not have it be "His wife," or "Father Somebody."'

'But, Hilda, God is supposed to work through intermediaries!'

Hilda Redman made a little gesture of impatience.

'Yes,' she answered, and there was a ring of contempt in her voice which Walter had never heard before. 'It is a very convenient means of trading upon the superstitions of those who believe in Him. I might persuade myself, as others have left no methods untried to persuade me, that God willed me to convert you to Catholicism, and it is barely conceivable that I might succeed in doing so. But it would all be a lie, my action, your conversion—all. I wonder how much of our longing that those about us should be of the same religion as ourselves is due to the fact that our vanity is offended because they differ from us?'

'That is probably at the basis of most dogmatic religion,' said Walter. 'Does it make so much difference to you that I am not a Catholic?' he continued, looking at his wife steadily.

'It does not offend my vanity, if you mean that,' replied Hilda, with a slight smile. 'I wish you were one, because I hate to feel that there is anything which divides us from each other, and if it is all true — if it is all true——' she repeated, and then she hesitated and stopped.

Walter Redman sat and watched her in silence. He would not tell her that to him it was all theory, this mighty fabric which theology had built upon the primitive superstitions of mankind: this fetish which

the priests and the churches had set up in the place of that true God who, dwelling in the midst of His creatures, needed no priest or temple from whence to speak to those who knew where to search for Him, and how to read His gospel in the writings traced by His own hand in the woodlands and the waters, and in all the moving pageantry of life.

CHAPTER XV

THE autumn passed pleasantly enough at Abbotsbury. A succession of visitors filled the house throughout November and December, and the Christmas festivities of the preceding year had been repeated according to the old traditions of the place. The gathering at the Hall, however, during Christmastide had not been so much of a family function as that of the year before. The Cawardens were keeping Christmas at their own place in Lancashire, and Lady Merton was in Rome. There were various members of the Redman family, and the remainder of the party consisted of old friends, of whom Mr. Shirley was one.

Hilda had been strongly advised by her doctor to go abroad immediately after Christmas. Though she had recovered satisfactorily, the climate of the Trent Valley in winter and early spring, with its damp, cold fogs, or keen easterly winds, was not all that could be desired for one who had recently been through a severe illness. The difficulty had been to decide where she and Walter should go. Hilda declared that she would not go to the Riviera. She had been several times to Cannes and Mentone when she was a girl, and had cordially disliked them, and Walter shared her dislike both of the places and of the life led in them.

The most interesting place that year within a reasonable distance of England seemed to be Rome. Lady

Merton had written to her daughter glowing descriptions of the impressive scenes to be witnessed in the Eternal City in consequence of the solemnities of the *Anno Santo*, and Lady Gwendolen had duly passed them on to Hilda; for since Lady Redman's illness her grandmother had corresponded with the latter far less frequently, and her letters were marked by a tone of decided disapproval and almost of coldness.

Hilda had never been to Rome, and the idea of visiting it for the first time during a Jubilee year appealed to her. Though she scarcely confessed as much to herself, she cherished some latent hope that a spring spent at Rome at a moment when the Church was celebrating some of its most imposing functions might serve as an object-lesson to Walter, and might help to awaken in him a sense of the universal power and influence of Catholicism.

The suggestion that they should spend two or three months at Rome had originated with Lady Gwendolen, and when Lord Redman saw that his wife was evidently pleased with the idea, he had at once agreed to it. Indeed, Walter Redman was thankful that the Riviera was not to be his fate for the spring. He knew Rome fairly well, and was fond of it—as who is not who really knows Rome?

The matter was not finally settled until shortly before Christmas, and when Mr. Shirley heard where Lord and Lady Redman were thinking of going for the spring, he manifested some surprise. He had heard from Walter of the circumstances which had attended Hilda's illness, and whence the direct cause of her premature confinement had proceeded.

'I think Rome is as good a place as any other to spend a few weeks in, and my wife has never been there,' Walter said, when discussing his plans with Mr. Shirley, as they were walking together one foggy afternoon at Abbotsbury, in a wooded part of the grounds known as the Groves.

Mr. Shirley paused and poked a piece of paper into the damp soil with the point of his walking-stick.

'I cannot bear seeing bits of paper lying about; it is one of my eccentricities,' he said, smiling.

'It is probably a love-letter of one of the under-gardeners,' remarked Walter. 'But what do you think of our Roman scheme?' he added after his companion had completed the operation to his satisfaction, and had carefully smoothed the surface of the soil which covered the offending object.

'I think,' replied Mr. Shirley, 'that you are a very bold man. You are taking your wife to a place where she will immediately be surrounded by people of the Lady Merton type. It is a species which flourishes exceedingly at Rome—in the English society, I mean —and in that Black world to which piety, real or assumed, is an entrance ticket. I am afraid that they will surround Lady Redman like flies.'

Walter Redman laughed.

'I have seen the sort of thing,' he said. 'It is very amusing to watch for a short time. I don't think, Ned, that it will be bad for Hilda to see it also. She can take care of herself now, I fancy.'

Mr. Shirley looked at him with some curiosity.

'Do you mean to go to Rome as an experiment?' he asked dryly.

'No,' said Walter simply. 'I have never thought of

it in that light. There is nothing to experimentalize about, I am glad to say. Hilda and I understand one another perfectly, and there is now no fear of mischief being made between us by our pious friends.'

'Well,' said Mr. Shirley, 'whether you intend it to be so, or not, I still regard your taking Lady Redman to Rome in the light of an experiment. One thing is certain: nobody—no thinking person, that is—can go to Rome for the first time and leave it in the same state of mind as that in which they came to it. I am speaking, of course, of its effect upon religious thought.'

'You must remember that it is her Mecca,' replied Walter Redman. 'It is natural that she should wish to go there this year, which, as I understand, is particularly holy.'

Mr. Shirley's lips curled slightly. He knew the true history and origin of Papal Jubilees.

'Of course,' he said quietly; 'but I was not thinking so much of Lady Redman as of yourself, Walter.'

'And why of me? Rome is not my Mecca, and I am not going to it for the first time!'

'In a sense you are going to it for the first time,' said Mr. Shirley; 'for, on your former visits there, you were merely a spectator, looking on at a remarkable psychological phenomenon in which you had no personal concern beyond that prompted by curiosity.'

'Do you call the Church of Rome a psychological phenomenon?' asked Walter, laughing. 'That is a very characteristic remark of yours, Ned!'

'Certainly I do,' answered Mr. Shirley. 'It is that which causes its study to be one of almost inexhaustible interest; and nowhere can it be studied to more advantage than at its centre.'

'But I have little more personal concern in it now than I had formerly,' said Walter.

'Have you not? If that child had been born alive, you would already have begun to think differently. This is why I cannot help wondering what the result of your visit to Rome will be. Lady Redman is hardly likely to be disillusionized by what she will see there—and you have no illusions.'

'And therefore we shall both return in the same frame of mind as we went.'

Mr. Shirley shook his head.

'I do not think that you will,' he replied, 'whatever may be the case with your wife. I am afraid,' he continued, 'that Lady Redman will naturally fall into the English Catholic set in Rome. It will be very difficult for her not to do so. Have you considered this contingency?'

'Yes,' answered Lord Redman; 'we have both considered it—Hilda not less so than myself. I am more bored than alarmed at the prospect.'

Mr. Shirley chuckled.

'That I can well understand,' he said; 'I have studied that society myself. At first it is interesting, if only on account of the novelty of finding one's self among a set of one's fellow-creatures who have lost both the power of reasoning and the sense of humour. They are forbidden to exercise the former, even if they possess it. The danger to Lady Redman will be that the old ladies, and the priests who go to tea with them, will attempt to renew their endeavours to oblige your wife to convert you, which have already nearly led to such disastrous consequences.'

'I am happy to say,' replied Walter, 'that my wife

has shown signs of being determined to exercise her reason; and she has no lack of the sense of humour. I feel no uneasiness as to her again allowing her religious feelings to be worked upon. She seems to me to have drawn a very distinct line in her own mind between religion and religious people. I think that she will defend herself against any further attempts of these last to interfere with her. But you say that you are more inclined to think of some mysterious danger to me as resulting from our expedition to Rome. I really can't see where I come in, Ned.'

Mr. Shirley smiled.

'Perhaps you won't come in,' he replied. 'It will very much depend upon the effect which Rome produces upon you, under the present circumstance of your life, whether you do or don't. In one thing, however, I may advise you for your future happiness and peace of mind: Do your best to show your wife the other side of the picture at Rome. Do not let her imagine that what she is allowed to see, and hear, and know, by Lady Merton and her *entourage*, is the real Rome. The priests play with these pious old ladies and weak-minded men as cats play with mice. Most of them are honest, and believe all they are told. A certain number are not so, and are advertising their piety merely as a means of getting into society. The latter peculiarity, I have always thought, is one of the most amusing features of Roman life. There are men and women who get up very early every morning and go to Mass, in order that they may sit up very late in the evening and be seen in the exclusive Black houses. You do not understand? Ah, well, you will do so if you watch a few social careers in Rome—

among our English compatriots, I mean; no other nationality exploits the next world in order to obtain social successes in this. No! I advise you both to watch the show as you would watch any other comedy —for a good deal of amusement and a little instruction. After all, from the Pope on the Sedia Gestatoria blessing the crowd in St. Peter's to the monsignori at Lady Merton's parties, from the miraculous Madonnas in the churches to the Venuses in the museums, from the Christs and St. Sebastians to the Apollos and the Adonises, all Rome is a puppet-show, and the only things which have been altered by Roman Christianity are the names of the puppets.'

Lord Redman looked at his companion with an amused expression. He enjoyed drawing Mr. Shirley out upon his favourite theories.

'Then Roman Catholicism——'

'Is an adapted form of Græco-Roman paganism, with a dash of Egyptian cult thrown in.'

'And the result is?'

'Lady Merton!' said Mr. Shirley dryly.

Walter Redman burst into a shout of laughter.

'You would be a most useful guide in Rome, Ned,' he exclaimed. 'I think you had better come with us, only your sentiments would horrify my wife.'

Mr. Shirley smiled again.

'I keep my pagan sentiments for your old oak-trees,' he said, looking round the groves. 'They understand.'

Walter looked at him quickly.

'I never know how far to take you seriously,' he said. 'Is there no such thing as truth for you anywhere in the world?'

'Wherever the Breath of Life is, there is Truth!'

replied Mr. Shirley, and the sarcasm of his manner vanished as he spoke; 'but the special location of Truth is the greatest of all lies. That is the lie common to Christianity, and which, in the Roman Church, reaches the depths of ignorant blasphemy. But, even so, Truth exists in Christianity, as it exists wherever created matter follows the Supreme Will and shapes its course to the Divine Ends. There is only one thing in this world which has been able to confound Truth, and that is Fear. It is Fear which makes men seek to locate Truth—human fear and distrust of God, and it is upon these that the churches and the priests thrive and multiply. Do you know many people in Rome?' added Mr. Shirley somewhat abruptly.

'Hardly anyone,' replied Walter, 'except a few Romans whom I have met over here. I know the Brancaleones, of course, and one or two others who come to England, but I don't think that Hilda knows anybody there.'

'Oh, the Brancaleones!' said Mr. Shirley. 'They have a pleasant house. You will not meet the convert element in Princess Brancaleone's drawing-rooms. I should like to give you a letter of introduction to a very old friend of mine in Rome. He is a man in whom you and Lady Redman would be interested.'

'Do, by all means,' replied Walter. 'What is his line—literary, scientific? His ideas won't shock Hilda, I hope!'

'He is a priest,' replied Mr. Shirley.

'A priest! and a friend of yours?'

'And why not? I have several friends among the

Roman Catholic clergy, both in Italy and in France. Does the fact surprise you so much?'

'Well, yes, my dear fellow, it does.'

'I cannot see why it should. I don't agree with them, but I respect and admire them. They are rare of their kind, that I grant you; but, being so, they are all the more valuable. This particular priest, whose acquaintance I should like you to make, is a certain Monsignor Martini. He is a Roman, but he has travelled much, and is an extremely enlightened and cultivated man. You are very likely to meet him if you go to the Brancaleones'; he is a great favourite of theirs. But if you care to take a letter to him from me, I think he would be useful to you. He will make you and Lady Redman acquainted with some of the most interesting people, lay and ecclesiastical, of the city—people you would rarely meet in ordinary society, and never in the houses frequented by Lady Merton's *clique*.'

'I should like very much to have a letter to him,' said Walter; 'but I hope he talks something else besides Italian, for Hilda does not know the language.'

'Martini is supposed to know fourteen languages,' answered Mr. Shirley, 'and to talk them all well. If he talks the remaining thirteen as well as he talks English, I envy him his talent as a linguist. He has been a great deal in England, and you will find him perfectly well informed on all our peculiarities, religious and otherwise.'

'Is he at the Vatican?' inquired Walter.

'Not now. He used to be. I forget in what capacity. At present he is not at all well looked upon by the authorities, on account of his liberal and con-

ciliatory utterances and writings. He is a Rosminian, and is not, therefore, tolerated by the reactionary and ultramontane wire-pullers who stand behind the Pope. He is obliged to keep very quiet, lest he should have an attack of pneumonia.'

'Pneumonia!'

'*Polmonite*, it is called in Rome. It is very fatal in that climate, especially to would-be religious reformers,' said Mr. Shirley dryly. 'Martini, I conclude, does not want to share the fate of his hero, Rosmini. He keeps himself very carefully in the background so long as the Jesuits rule through Leo XIII. But to those with whom he feels it is safe to do so, he will talk freely, and I have spent many delightful hours in his company, and in that of some of his friends to whom he has introduced me.'

'I hope you will come to Rome yourself, Ned, while we are there,' said Walter Redman.

'Perhaps I may get there,' replied Mr. Shirley. 'Are you going to a hotel?'

'No; Hilda thinks it would be tiresome. We mean to stay three months between Rome and Naples, so we are going to take an apartment and bring some of our own servants out with us. I have no doubt we could give you a room if you came,' he added.

Mr. Shirley laughed.

'What would Lady Redman's family say if she extended her hospitality in Rome to such a heretic as myself?' he replied. 'No, Walter; many thanks, all the same, but you would more than ever be supposed to be trying to pervert your wife from Catholicism by exposing her to my pernicious influence. I shall be extremely curious to see the result of your experiment.

I insist upon calling it an experiment, though you decline to see it in that light.'

They turned into a broad gravel walk which led down a gentle slope, at the foot of which stood the gray, battlemented old hall. The faint, red rays of the winter sunset glanced on the mullioned windows. The foggy air had cleared as evening approached, and a procession of rooks was streaming across a primrose-coloured sky, on their way to their homes in the ancient rookeries of Redman's Cross. The harsh crow of cock pheasants challenging each other before going to roost, and blackbirds chattering excitedly in the clumps of rhododendrons, alone broke the silence after Mr. Shirley's last remark. The latter glanced at Lord Redman, and then his gaze wandered to the picturesque old pile of buildings below them. They passed through the great gateway into the courtyard, and thence into the entrance-hall, with its trophies of armour and windows of painted glass.

'I wonder very much,' he said to himself, as a footman took his hat and walking-stick from him and helped him off with his overcoat, 'what the result of the experiment will be!'

CHAPTER XVI

LADY MERTON had received the intelligence that Hilda and her husband were coming to Rome for the remainder of the winter and spring with great satisfaction. She had been not a little mortified at the failure of her attempts to arouse in her grand-daughter a proper sense of her duties towards the Church, but she consoled herself with the reflection that at Rome she would have greater facilities for bringing both Hilda and Lord Redman under the influence of the outward pomp and circumstance of Catholicism by which she herself was so much fascinated and impressed. She would be able, moreover, to surround them with an atmosphere of what she and her friend Mrs. St. Leger described as 'Catholic piety,' and with this object in view she had already told all her more intimate acquaintances in the Black world that Lord and Lady Redman were about to arrive, and had given them to understand that great advantages to the cause of Catholicism in England were likely to be the result of the visit of so rich and influential a peer as Lord Redman to the Eternal City during the Holy Year of Jubilee.

Notwithstanding her recent experiences, she did not hesitate to represent Lord Redman to her friends in Rome as she had represented him to those in England who had been disposed to object to Miss Cawarden's engagement to him on the score of his Protestantism.

It was not difficult to arouse the curiosity and interest of her Roman friends regarding the Redmans, and in this Lady Merton was ably seconded by Mrs. St. Leger. The latter was barely acquainted with Hilda, whom she had only seen before her marriage, and Lord Redman she had never seen at all. Her ideas concerning him were entirely derived from all that she had heard from Lady Merton and from his cousin, Mary Russell. The conversation in the Via Gregoriana, where Lady Merton and Mrs. St. Leger were installed in the apartment which the former usually rented when she came to Rome, had frequently turned upon the Redmans, and Lady Merton would draw vivid word-pictures to sympathizing ladies and ecclesiastics of the anguish of mind which her grand-daughter was undergoing on account of her husband's reluctance to take the final step and join the Church.

'There can be no doubt,' she said, 'that this determination to come to Rome is a direct answer to our prayers that Lord Redman may be brought nearer to the Church. His wife is terribly anxious that all he sees and hears while here should make a good impression upon him. Her letters to me are really quite touching, poor thing!'

Lady Merton had been giving one of her periodical luncheon parties, and her guests were sitting in the drawing-room afterwards discussing their coffee and their acquaintances.

'It is so fortunate that they will see Rome under your auspices, my dear Lady Merton,' said Madame de Hohenthal. 'As your dear Queen used to say to me, it makes such a difference how and with whom one sees Rome.'

'I did not know that the Queen had ever been here,' said a young Englishman who was one of the party. He had but recently come to Rome, and was not aware of Madame de Hohenthal's peculiarities.

'Ah, well, monsieur, perhaps it was not your Queen. No, now I think of it, it was the Princess of Wales. One gets confused, you know. During my official life in your country I was so intimate with your royalties.'

'Oh,' said Lady Merton, 'as to that, of course I shall do my best to insure that they shall see Rome properly; not the Rome of these miserable Italians, but *our* Rome, you know. They could not come at a better moment. Nobody could fail to be impressed by the scenes of enthusiasm and devotion which we daily see around us in this wonderful year.'

'I quite agree with you, Lady Merton,' observed an English monsignore, taking a liberal pinch of snuff as he spoke. 'This year Rome belongs to the pilgrims, not to the tourists. It is a wonderful sight, a marvellous proof of the power of the Church to draw her children from all quarters of the globe. I hear that the Protestants are very much impressed, and no doubt Lord Redman will be so. He is a clever man, you say?'

'Yes,' answered Lady Merton, 'he is clever, but oh, so helpless! blown about by every wind of doctrine, poor fellow! Like all Protestants, he lacks the stability which only reliance on the authority of the true Church can give.'

'If he is a clever man,' said Monsignor Chester, blowing his nose loudly with a coloured silk pocket-handkerchief, 'he cannot fail to be struck with the proofs of the Church's authority which he will see all

around him in Rome. Of course you will take steps to procure him and Lady Redman an audience of the Holy Father?'

'Most certainly!' replied Lady Merton. 'I have already told the Maestro di Camera all about them both, and he has promised me to arrange that matter. I am most anxious that it should be fully understood at the Vatican how much the conversion of a man like Lord Redman would mean for our cause in England.'

'Yes,' said Monsignor Chester bluntly; 'English people like lords.'

'The influence of a prominent man like Lord Redman on the masses is naturally considerable,' said Mrs. St. Leger; 'his conversion would be followed by many others.'

'And his own soul,' said Madame de Hohenthal. 'Think of the joy it will be to dear Lady Merton to know that she has been the means of bringing salvation to this gentleman, Lord—Redman—is it not?'

'Oh, yes, his soul—yes, of course,' replied Lady Merton, a little absently.

'Ah, madame,' said Mrs. St. Leger to Madame de Hohenthal, 'Lady Merton's object is so wide, so far-reaching. She is thinking of the good of our holy religion in a schismatic country. The salvation of an individual soul is important enough, of course. But when, as in the case of Lord Redman, a conversion mplies the setting of an example which is sure to give confidence to other doubting souls, and so enable them to imitate it, it becomes doubly important. The influence of the nobility is so great in England.'

Lady Merton coughed. Her converts were a little trying to her occasionally; for, though she was largely

surrounded by people of Mrs. St. Leger's class, whose piety was more apparent than their good breeding, she was what she looked, a well-born woman of the world. When her friend Mrs. St. Leger talked of the 'aristocracy' or, as she frequently did, with bated breath, of the 'Roman nobility,' Lady Merton felt uncomfortable and would try to turn the conversation.

'They will be here by the end of the week,' she said. 'My grand-daughter writes to me that she feels so thankful to think her prayers have, so far, been answered, and that she has been able to prevail upon her husband to come to Rome during this Holy Year. Of course he has been here before, but simply *en tourist*, and before the days when he had any leanings towards the Church.'

'I have heard Lord Redman spoken of as being an absolute sceptic,' observed Monsignor Chester. 'I am surprised to hear you say that he has any leanings towards Catholicism.'

Lady Merton glanced at Mrs. St. Leger, and then smiled indulgently.

'People always exaggerate things,' she replied; 'so many very young men profess religious scepticism. They imagine that by doing so they will be considered interesting. I believe that at one time Walter Redman was really what is called a free-thinker, and that it was not a youthful *pose* on his part. He was a decidedly clever young man, and no doubt fell into bad hands at one of those horrid Protestant universities—Cambridge, I think it was—where nothing is allowed to be true unless it agrees with the latest scientific fad. By degrees, however, his common-sense has asserted itself, and he has emancipated himself to a great extent from his

earlier ideas. Of course, there still remain old prejudices to be overcome, and, I regret to say, he still keeps up his intercourse with some of his University friends, whose influence is probably holding him back. His marriage with my grand-daughter has, naturally, brought him into closer contact with Catholicism, and we are convinced that he is gradually becoming more and more attracted towards the Church.'

'Mixed marriages are a great mistake,' remarked Monsignor Chester, fumbling in his pocket for his snuff-box.

Lady Merton looked annoyed for an instant. Monsignor Chester possessed the knack—a very uncommon one with Roman ecclesiastics—of invariably saying the wrong thing at the wrong moment. He was a convert himself, and had been an Anglican clergyman of pronounced High Church views. The garb of the Roman priest, however, had never been able to conceal the parsonic manner, while, owing, no doubt, to his English and Protestant training and education, he had never been able to acquire the suave and polished address usual among the higher grades of the clergy of his newly-adopted creed.

'My grand-daughter's marriage was one of affection,' said Lady Merton. 'We were all very much opposed to it, and it was the first time that one of the Cawarden family had ever married a Protestant. Lord Redman's evident interest in the Church, however, caused my daughter to feel that she might be interfering with the ways of Almighty God were she to persist in her refusal to allow it. I must say that, personally, I always considered the engagement to be an unfortunate one; but my advice was not listened to.'

Madame de Hohenthal leaned forward in her chair with some eagerness.

'Ah!' she exclaimed, 'they are not happy together? He does not treat her well, no doubt. I suppose that she is persecuted on account of her religion!'

Lady Merton hesitated for a moment before replying. Madame de Hohenthal's tongue had caused mischief in more than one European capital where her late husband had represented his Government diplomatically; and she had not laid aside with her Protestantism her capacity for damaging the reputations of her acquaintances. Indeed, the air of Rome being unusually favourable to the development of such a capacity, many little stories were conceived and born in Madame de Hohenthal's sitting-room at the little hotel which she patronized during her winter residence in the Eternal City.

'It would be too strong a thing to assert that they are not happy together,' said Lady Merton after a pause. 'As I say, the marriage was one of affection,' she added, marking the tense of the latter verb with the faintest possible inflexion. 'Monsignor Chester is quite right,' she continued, with a little sigh, 'when he says that mixed marriages are a mistake. My granddaughter cannot, of course, be as happy as we should wish to see her, when she knows that her husband is surrounded by friends and relations who are striving to counteract her influence over him.'

'Poor Lady Redman!' murmured Madame de Hohenthal, whose face had assumed an expression of keen interest while Lady Merton was speaking. 'I can sympathize with her so well. Ah! they are such bigoted people, those Protestants! I remember what

it was when I became a Catholic. How happy I am to think that they are coming to Rome! Here we shall have them in our charge, dear Lady Merton. We will take care that Lord Redman falls into good hands, will we not, Mrs. St. Leger?'

'Yes, indeed!' said the latter. 'We may hope that the society in which Lord and Lady Redman will find themselves will have its good influence on the former. To be in the midst of good Catholic society——'

'They know very few people here, I conclude?' interrupted Monsignor Chester—'among the Romans, I mean.'

'Very few, I think,' replied Lady Merton. 'I met that odious woman Princess Brancaleone the other day at a tea, and she told me that Lord Redman was a friend of hers, and that she was delighted to hear he was coming, and hoped to make the acquaintance of his wife. It is so disagreeable meeting those Quirinal people,' she added, 'but I could not avoid her. She came up and spoke to me.'

Madame de Hohenthal held up her hands in horror.

'Princess Brancaleone!' she exclaimed. 'Oh, my dear Lady Merton, you must not let them go to the Palazzo Montelupi! She is a horrid woman! There are all sorts of stories about her first marriage, you know, and how she got her money. They will meet all the *canaille* of the White party there, and—oh, no, it is certainly not the house for a respectable young married woman to go to, is it, Monsignore?' she added, appealing to Monsignor Chester.

'Certainly not,' said the latter in his most abrupt manner; 'they are a most mischievous couple, the young Prince and Princess Brancaleone. They are

Liberals!' he concluded, getting rather red, and wiping his brow with his pocket-handkerchief.

'They say that he is secretly a Freemason,' said Madame de Hohenthal.

Mrs. St. Leger made the sign of the cross.

'I shall certainly warn my grand-daughter to have nothing to do with Princess Brancaleone,' said Lady Merton. 'I trust that she will prevent her husband from going to the Palazzo Montelupi.'

When she and Mrs. St. Leger were left alone together, the latter ventured to remark that Madame de Hohenthal would certainly spread about a report that Lord and Lady Redman did not get on well with each other.

'I dare say she will,' replied Lady Merton. 'Poor dear Madame de Hohenthal's tongue runs away with her sometimes. It will do no harm if she does invent some story about them; and if it should come to Lord Redman's ears, it may make him realize what is thought of his conduct in trying to separate his wife from those of her own faith.'

Mrs. St. Leger was silent. She had a profound reverence for Lady Merton as one who had been the means of converting many souls to the Church; and however much she might be aware of the inaccuracy of her statements regarding the condition of things between her grand-daughter and Lord Redman, she was quite convinced in her own mind that, where the making of converts or the advancement of the interests of the Church was concerned, all methods were lawful.

CHAPTER XVII

THROUGH the good offices of a friend in the English Embassy, Walter Redman had secured the lease of a villa situated in the modern quarter of Rome for the winter and spring months.

It was tenanted by a diplomatic couple who were away on leave, and as both Lord Redman and Hilda disliked the idea of hotel life for so many weeks, they had considered themselves fortunate to find a comfortably furnished house which would hold themselves and their servants, and in which they could feel independent of the tourists who were crowding the hotels out of curiosity to witness the medieval ceremonies of the Anno Santo.

The impression left upon Hilda's mind by the first few days after her arrival in Rome was one of complete bewilderment. The place seemed so small, and yet so full of vast and varied interests, that it appeared to be well-nigh hopeless to decide as to how to commence the process which she felt could only be described as one of disentanglement.

For the first day or two it was occupation enough to drive about the city and watch the various nationalities with which the streets were thronged. Rome that year seemed to be indeed the mother of the world, and the mixture of races to be seen jostling each

other in the Corso, or watching the sunset from the Pincio, could only be equalled by the coming and going of the peoples of the earth crossing the Golden Horn by the famous bridge of Galata.

As a matter of course the first building that Hilda visited was St. Peter's. She and Walter drove down to the great basilica on the morning after their arrival. As they pushed aside the heavy leathern curtains—the 'squash-babies' of the Romans—and entered the church, her first impression had been one of awed admiration. She had heard that the first glimpse of St. Peter's provoked disappointment, that its immense size was not realized except upon better acquaintance with the mighty fabric.

To Hilda, on the contrary, the imposing dimensions of the church seemed at once to seize hold of her imagination, and to keep it spell-bound. She almost wished afterwards that she had turned and left the building when that one first sense of bewildered admiration was fresh in her mind.

The vast expanse of marble pavement was dotted over with ever-moving groups of human beings, the sound of whose footsteps was as the sound of the sea in her ears.

Broad rays of sunlight were streaming down through the square windows of the cupola, flashing upon the golden lamps burning round the confessional of the Apostles, and falling here and there upon the violet robes of some ecclesiastic as he passed to or from the sacristy, and made his genuflection before the sacred tomb or opposite the great gates which guard the altar of the Sacrament.

Faintly, as though echoed from the threshold of

another world, the sounds of chanting fell upon her ears, voices of invisible singers, now swelling into harmony, now soaring aloft in the rich, full notes of a single soprano, the strains of which seemed to tremble and then dissolve into the majestic space of the great dome above.

Walter Redman, standing by his wife's side, watched the varying expressions of her face.

'You are not disappointed?' he asked.

Hilda drew a long breath.

'Disappointed! No,' she replied. 'It is glorious, Walter. Were you not impressed the first time you came into St. Peter's?'

'Yes,' he said, 'I think that I felt as you are feeling now.'

They walked slowly up the nave of the church together, and the sound of the chanting in the chapel on the left sounded ever louder and more triumphant. High Mass was being celebrated. 'Et credo in Unam Sanctam Catholicam et Apostolicam Ecclesiam!' The words of the creed rang out clearly, almost defiantly, as Hilda and her husband paused opposite the open gates of the chapel. A dense crowd was around them. Some few, the oldest and the poorest, were kneeling on the marble pavement, their lips moving in prayer, and a look of wrapt devotion on their faces. The majority were whispering and laughing together, nudging each other to look at some peculiarity of the ritual, or standing on camp-stools in order to get a better view.

'Come away from these people,' said Hilda, in an undertone, surveying them with a look of mingled surprise and disgust. 'Let us try to get inside the chapel,' she added; 'it will be better there.'

It was no very easy matter to push their way gradually through the throng, and by the time they found themselves within the chapel, the choir in the gallery above burst forth with the opening strains of the *Sanctus*. Clouds of incense rose and hung, blue and wavering in the sunbeams; the acolytes and officiating priests grouped themselves in front of the altar, preparatory to the consecration of the elements and the elevation of the Host.

Hilda's eyes wandered round the chapel, and rested upon the rows of ecclesiastics seated in the stalls on each side of the altar, with their purple cassocks and the fur capes on their shoulders. A stir and rustle in the crowd around her betokened the approach of the solemn moments of the Elevation, but the look of bored indifference on the faces of the Canons of St. Peter's gave place to no expression of reverence. Hilda noticed, with the same sense of astonishment and distaste which she had experienced at the behaviour of the sightseers in the nave of the church, that some of the richly robed dignitaries were half asleep, others were taking snuff or whispering to one another, while on the countenances of all, with one or two exceptions, was written the weariness produced by a tiresome routine, and on some, she could not help thinking, an impatient incredulity.

After the Elevation, Hilda and her husband made an attempt to leave the chapel, but the crowd had by this time closed up all means of exit, and they were obliged to await the conclusion of the Mass.

As the ecclesiastics left, the crowd parted to allow them to pass through it. As they came by, not in orderly procession, but shuffling carelessly one after the

other, Hilda could not help scanning their faces. It was with an undefined feeling of repulsion that she gazed upon the heavy, sensual countenances, the unpleasant-looking mouths, and the furtive, restless eyes which were the distinguishing features of the majority.

It was with a little sigh of relief that she found herself once more in the broad, open space of the nave. She leaned for a while against one of the pillars, and allowed her gaze to wander round the great temple. As she looked, she became conscious that the first impressions which she had received on entering the building had become less intense. Perhaps her eyes had grown accustomed to the vastness around her. It was certain that she felt no longer the same sensation of awe and admiration which had laid hold of her with such force at the moment of her passing the portals of the basilica.

The scene at the High Mass had jarred upon her. It had seemed to strike a false note on what should be one complete harmony of religious feeling. Hilda was glad that her husband had made no remark to her as they left the chapel. She wondered whether he, also, had noticed the carelessness and want of reverence during the Mass.

But Walter said nothing. He stood by her side and watched with quiet attention the groups of people passing up and down the nave.

Presently they moved onwards towards the Confessional, and here Walter hung back. He knew that his wife, as a Catholic, would wish to kneel before the tomb of the Apostles on the occasion of her first visit to St. Peter's. Hilda went forward alone, and joined the

group of worshippers kneeling at the white marble balustrade surrounding the steps which lead down to the golden gates of the shrine.

She knelt a few minutes in silent prayer, and as she endeavoured to concentrate her thoughts, and pray in a spirit which should be worthy of that holy place, she glanced upwards into the great vault of the cupola. Why was it, she wondered, that she could not feel as she wished to feel? She had prayed better, and felt herself to be nearer to God, in many a little humble church in England—nay, in the privacy of her own room—than she did here in the mighty temple of her faith — in St. Peter's at Rome. Her thoughts refused to submit themselves to her will, and with a vague feeling at once of disappointment and of dissatisfaction with herself, she rose from her knees. She looked round for Walter, and for a minute or two could not see him. At last she distinguished him. He was standing near the supposed statue of St. Peter, watching the people coming up and kissing its worn bronze foot. As Hilda came closer to him, she was struck with the expression on his face. It was not contempt or disapproval which she saw written on his countenance, but rather a look of great reverence. She stood a few paces from him, watching him silently.

A group of pilgrims who had gathered round the statue passed on, and following in their wake came an old peasant woman, bent and infirm, leading or being led by a little child. Tremblingly she advanced, and reaching up her mouth to the foot of the statue, kissed it with her withered lips, and then pressed her wrinkled brow upon the cold bronze. Stooping down, she tried to lift the child, but her strength was unequal to the

task. Then Hilda saw her husband step forward. Raising the child gently in his arms, he held its little face to the statue, the old woman blessing him as he did so. Turning round, he saw Hilda, and came towards her.

'The little beggar couldn't reach so far,' he said, and Hilda smiled at him without replying.

Presently he looked inquiringly at her. He had expected her to be more enthusiastic on the glories of St. Peter's, and a glance at her face told him that something was troubling her. The look of reverent admiration which he had seen on her countenance as she came into the church had disappeared, and in its place was one of doubt and perplexity.

'It does not impress you?' he asked her.

'I do not know,' answered Hilda; 'it oppresses rather than impresses me, I think. It is not like a church.'

She gazed around and above her as she spoke. There seemed to her to be no repose for the eye in any part of the vast edifice. Indeed, now that she was able more thoroughly to grasp its details, she realized that it was the eye which was offended at every turn, and that the one redeeming feature which seemed to crush and absorb the vulgarity of the building was the majesty of its proportions. Her gaze wandered, seeking rest and finding none, from the distorted statues in their niches above the nave to the grotesque and occasionally painful monuments to the Popes around the walls; from the meretricious *baldacchino* above the high altar to the pompous ugliness of Bernini's chair of St. Peter behind it at the western extremity of the basilica.

'I suppose that I cannot take it in,' she said, a little

wearily; 'perhaps a second visit——' and then she stopped, feeling in her heart that she should never recover the lost impression which the first glimpse of the interior of St. Peter's had made upon her. 'Shall we go?' she continued. 'I think I have seen enough for this morning.'

Walter Redman assented readily enough.

The interior of St. Peter's had never possessed any charm for him; he regarded it as a colossal monument to bad taste and to arrogance, both worldly and spiritual.

It was a relief to both when they emerged from the portico, and stood under the pure, blue sky of the heavens. The great fountains were tossing up their waters to the sunlight laughing and sparkling upon them, and the Piazza was thronged with carriages and pedestrians coming and going to and from the basilica and the Vatican.

They descended the steps, trying to distinguish their carriage among the ranks of those drawn up in the shade of the Colonnades. Winged words were flying between a group of French and German pilgrims as they passed. The faces of the disputants did not wear a particularly holy expression, while 'Cochons d'Allemands!' from the Frenchmen, and some decidedly unscriptural language from the Teutons fell upon their ears as they approached them.

A *guardia* politely invited the pilgrims to move on, and some Romans who witnessed the little scene laughed. One of them made some remark which caused Lord Redman, who overheard it, to laugh also.

'What is it all about?' Hilda asked him, for Italian was an unknown tongue to her.

'Apparently it is about half a franc,' said Walter, smiling.

'But what did those Italians say which made the people laugh?'

Walter hesitated.

'Oh, well, Romans are very cynical, you know, especially about their priests. One of the pilgrims had dropped half a franc, and another, a German, picked it up and declared that the coin was his. A Roman said to him, "Take it up to the Holy Father and buy an indulgence with it." Of course they couldn't understand him, but their language was decidedly bad.'

'It was very irreverent of you to laugh, Walter,' said Hilda.

'I couldn't help it,' replied Lord Redman, looking at his wife with some contrition; 'it was a typical Roman observation, and they have a very humorous way of saying the most sarcastic things. Pasquino would never be at a loss for something to say, if he were allowed to speak in these days.'

Walter did not think it necessary to explain to his wife the bitter irony which was wrapped up in the remark which had caused so much merriment in the crowd. He had determined to leave her to form her own conclusions from her visit to Rome, and not to attempt to influence her judgment in any way.

'What shall we do this afternoon?' he asked, as they drove homeward to luncheon.

'I thought that we might leave some cards, and drive into the Campagna,' replied Hilda. 'You want to call upon Princess Brancaleone, and to leave the letter which Mr. Shirley gave us to Monsignor Martini,' she continued.

'Yes,' Walter answered, 'let us do that. It is better to keep our sight-seeing for the mornings, and a drive in the afternoons will rest you.'

Hilda looked up at the clock on the Castle of St. Angelo as the carriage turned to cross the bridge.

'We shall find my grandmother and Mrs. St. Leger waiting for us,' she said. 'I did not know it was so late.'

'Mrs. St. Leger! Who is she?' asked Walter.

'Oh, did I not tell you?' exclaimed Hilda. 'It was very stupid of me to forget to do so. Mrs. St. Leger is a great friend of grandmama's, and when I asked the latter to come to luncheon with us to-day, she asked if she might bring Mrs. St. Leger, as she is staying with her.'

'Do you know her?'

Hilda made a little face.

'I have seen her once or twice before I married,' she replied. 'She became a Catholic, and she is constantly with my grandmother. I don't think you will like her, Walter.'

'Probably not,' said the latter dryly; 'but I don't see how you could have avoided asking her under the circumstances.'

When they reached the villa in the Via Gaeta, the servant who opened the door informed Hilda that Lady Merton and another lady were waiting in the drawing-room.

Whatever coldness had existed towards Hilda and her husband on Lady Merton's part was evidently to be forgotten in Rome, for nothing could exceed the cordiality of her manner to both of them. The meeting between them was rendered the easier inasmuch as

there had never been any open hostility on either side. Indignant as Walter had been with Lady Merton at the time of his wife's illness, he had determined to have no quarrel with her, and he had therefore never enlightened her as to what had made him take such decided measures for preventing Hilda's relatives from having any private access to her while she was laid up. Lady Merton, indeed, had not the least idea of the state of nervous excitement in which her grand-daughter had been, and still less did she suspect that it was Hilda herself who had implored her husband to act as he had done.

As matters had turned out, Walter Redman felt that he had reason to be grateful to Lady Merton rather than otherwise, since the fact that he and Hilda no longer felt that their difference of opinion on religious subjects was never to be discussed between them was entirely the result, albeit an unforeseen one, of her policy. The conversation at luncheon naturally turned upon Hilda's first impressions of Rome. Lady Merton purred soft notes of approval when she heard that they had been spending their morning at St. Peter's.

'Of course,' she said; 'it is the first thing you would wish to see. One does not feel in Rome until a visit has been paid to the tomb of the Apostles.'

'And do tell me, Lady Redman,' said Mrs. St. Leger, 'what did you think of it? It is so interesting to hear people's first impressions of St. Peter's.'

Hilda hesitated. Looking across the table, she met her husband's eyes fixed upon her, as though he also was interested to hear her reply. The feeling that he was listening for it seemed to add to the difficulty she found in answering Mrs. St. Leger's question.

'It is very—large!' she said, after a pause; and as the words left her lips she fully realized their weakness.

Mrs. St. Leger and Lady Merton looked surprised, and Hilda fancied that her husband was struggling with an inclination to laugh. It certainly was a very *banal* remark, she thought, and she was glad when Mrs. St. Leger's next observation helped her to redeem it.

'Ah, yes!' the latter replied. 'One is absolutely bewildered by the immense size of the church; overcome, too, by the holiness and the sacred traditions of the spot. It is only after repeated visits that one is able to take in the full beauty of St. Peter's.'

'Yes,' exclaimed Hilda with eagerness; 'I am quite sure it must be so! We cannot possibly judge of it from a single visit.'

'But you,' added Mrs. St. Leger, turning to Walter, 'have been several times in Rome, have you not, Lord Redman? You will be able to point out the wonders of St. Peter's to Lady Redman.'

'I am afraid I should be a poor guide,' replied Walter with a smile.

'Ah, well, unluckily you are not one of us, but still——'

Mrs. St. Leger paused and became rather red. Lord Redman was looking at her quietly, and there was something in his glance which caused her to feel that she was taking a liberty.

'I am afraid,' continued Walter, ignoring her remark, 'that I have nothing to add to my wife's criticism of St. Peter's that you would be likely to agree with. It is certainly very large. That,' he added, a little

maliciously, 'is a characteristic which nobody can deny to it.'

'But you do not admire it?' said Lady Merton in astonishment.

'Honestly, no, I do not. There are churches in Rome that I admire far more—Santa Maria Maggiore, for instance.'

'But, surely, Lord Redman, the sanctity of St. Peter's——' murmured Mrs. St. Leger.

'I am not criticising its sanctity, but merely its artistic beauty,' replied Walter.

'Ah!' said Lady Merton. 'You must realize the one in order to appreciate the other, my dear Walter!'

Hilda hastened to change the topic of conversation, and caused it to flow into less dangerous channels. As soon as luncheon was over, Walter left the ladies alone together, after suggesting to Hilda that the carriage should be ordered at half-past two.

'How are you going to employ your afternoon?' asked Lady Merton, when they reached the drawing-room and the servants had brought in the coffee.

'We are going to drive on the Campagna,' replied Hilda. 'And Walter wants to call upon one or two people. By the way,' she added, 'in what part of Rome is the Palazzo Montelupi?'

'It is in the old quarter, near the Capitol,' said Lady Merton.

'I suppose you know the Brancaleones?' continued Hilda. 'They are friends of Walter's, but I have never seen them.'

Lady Merton drew herself up stiffly.

'I have the barest possible acquaintance with Princess

Brancaleone. The Palazzo Montelupi is not a house which loyal Catholics ought to frequent.'

'No, indeed!' interposed Mrs. St. Leger, with a sigh.

'Prince Brancaleone is a traitor,' continued Lady Merton. 'He has thrown off his allegiance to his lawful Sovereign and joined the Italian usurpers of Rome. His wife is not at all a nice person, Hilda, and I am very sorry to hear that Walter knows her.'

'But he says she is charming!' said Hilda. 'And I have heard many people say the same thing.'

'Plenty of men think her charming,' replied Lady Merton dryly, 'but I do not know that their wives agree with them on the subject.'

'She is very handsome, is she not?'

'Yes, undeniably so, and always beautifully dressed—one of those women who put on exactly the right thing for every occasion.'

'A very dangerous woman!' murmured Mrs. St. Leger, looking at Lady Redman out of the corners of her eyes.

'In what way dangerous?' asked the latter.

'Oh, my dear child!' said Lady Merton. 'These *soi-disantes* political women are always dangerous when they are young and good-looking. There are even some who succeed in being so when they are old. If a woman wants to keep a certain number of men, and one particular man, at her feet without causing a scandal, she has only to pretend to be political. As a *pose* it is safer than the artistic or literary one. Artists and authors always manage to get their *liaisons* talked about. Political women, I suppose, have more knowledge of the world.'

'Is Princess Brancaleone a political woman?' asked Hilda.

'She has made her house a centre for the political adventurers of the Quirinal party,' answered Lady Merton, 'and for those who are opposed to the Church and religion generally. But there are many people who say that the political salon is only an antechamber after all.'

'Her politics are not likely to interest either Walter or myself,' said Hilda quietly.

Lady Merton looked a little searchingly at her granddaughter.

'Of course not,' she answered. 'As a Catholic, you could have only one opinion of her political views.'

'But Princess Brancaleone is a Catholic? I thought that she was born a Carmichael.'

Lady Merton shrugged her shoulders.

'All these people pretend to be Catholics,' she said, 'but they are false Catholics, traitors to their religion and to the Holy Father. Complete submission, and implicit obedience to the Vatican as representing the seat of civil and religious government, are the marks of a true Catholic. You will discover that for yourself when you have been a short time in Rome—will she not, Emily?'

'Indeed you will, Lady Redman,' said Mrs. St. Leger, 'and I am thankful that dear Lady Merton, who knows Rome so well, is here to warn you against those wicked people who pretend to be Catholics like ourselves, but who are striving all the time to overthrow our holy religion.'

'Well, Hilda,' said Lady Merton solemnly, 'I hope you will take my advice, for I think that I may fairly

claim to know Rome well. You must recollect that Walter is not a Catholic, and he will be unable to protect you from the contaminating influences of such people as the Brancaleones. It should be your duty, on the other hand, to protect him. You should try your best to ensure that, while your husband is in Rome, he should be thrown with good Catholics.'

'Walter is quite capable of taking care of himself,' replied Hilda, smiling. 'I should not think of attempting to influence his choice of friends,' she added firmly.

Lady Merton drew herself up in her arm-chair, and looked in astonishment at her grand-daughter, while Mrs. St. Leger cast her eyes up to the ceiling, whereon were divers well-developed cherubs disporting themselves in a state of nudity, tossing pink legs about among garlands and rose-coloured clouds.

'I must confess that I am utterly unable to understand your frame of mind, Hilda,' she said severely.

There was an uncomfortable pause after Lady Merton's remark. Hilda wished that her husband had not deserted her, for she dreaded lest Lady Merton should seize the opportunity of lecturing her upon the necessity of converting him. Since her illness, however, her grandmother did not appear to be so formidable a person. The consciousness that she could turn to Walter for advice and assistance, and that they were able freely to talk to each other on matters of religious belief, seemed to have given her the strength to feel more or less indifferent to what others might think of her conduct in not endeavouring to bring about his conversion to Catholicism. Even the supernatural fears which had been so easily worked upon before her illness now seemed almost entirely to

have vanished. She wondered that the words of her relations, and those of the priest whom they had deputed to reason with her, should have had the power to terrify her so much. They did not care about her husband's soul any more than those old Canons whom she had seen lolling in their stalls in St. Peter's that morning cared about the Mass at which they were nominally assisting. It was the temporal welfare and influence of an institution which they were seeking to advance, not the spiritual benefit of an individual.

It was with a feeling of relief that Hilda saw the door of the drawing-room open and Walter reappear. Perhaps he had returned to her with the purpose of not leaving her too long alone with Lady Merton and the lady who, had she received any encouragement, would have talked religion to him at luncheon. Hilda noticed that he looked at her a little anxiously as he entered the room. Very shortly after his return to the drawing-room Lady Merton rose, and, accompanied by Mrs. St. Leger, took her departure. The cordiality of her manner had somewhat modified, and Hilda, who knew her moods, could see that she was thoroughly displeased.

'A detestable woman!' exclaimed Walter, as he heard the hall-door close upon the two ladies.

'Which—my grandmother?' asked Hilda demurely.

Her husband laughed.

'I was alluding to the other,' he replied.

'Mrs. St. Leger? I told you that you would not like her. She is supposed to be a saint.'

Lord Redman laughed again. His wife amused him considerably sometimes.

'So I only like the society of sinners,' he replied; '*you* should not say so, at all events.'

'Walter,' said Hilda suddenly, 'is Princess Brancaleone a political woman?'

'Not that I know of,' replied her husband. 'She may be so, perhaps, for she has a great position here. But why do you ask?'

'My grandmother was talking of her just now. She has been warning me against her.'

Walter Redman looked puzzled.

'Warning you against her?' he repeated. 'Why on earth should she do that, I wonder? She is a woman whom everybody knows and likes.'

'So I thought,' said Hilda. 'But they both spoke of her as though she were not a very nice person.'

'I think that I understand,' observed Walter, after a pause, as though a sudden idea had struck him. 'You will soon make her acquaintance,' he added, 'and then you will be able to judge for yourself. Perhaps you will find that she is less of a politician than Lady Merton.'

It was Hilda's turn to look puzzled now, and she was about to ask Walter what he meant when a servant came in to announce that the carriage was waiting, and she went upstairs to dress for her drive.

CHAPTER XVIII

HILDA and her husband had barely finished dinner that evening when Prince and Princess Brancaleone's cards were brought to them. These were accompanied by a letter addressed to Lady Redman and a note for Walter, and they were told that a servant was waiting for an answer.

On opening her missive, Hilda found a card inviting her and her husband to dinner at the Palazzo Montelupi the following evening at half-past eight.

Walter's note was from the Princess herself. In it she apologized for the shortness of the invitation, but explained that the evening for which she had asked them was the one on which she received, and that, therefore, if Lady Redman and he would come, she hoped to make them acquainted with some of the Roman world.

Walter pushed the note across the table to his wife.

'Let us go, by all means!' she said when she had read it. 'It is very kind of them asking us at once to dine with them, and I am longing to see the inside of a great Roman palace.'

She wrote a formal acceptance in French, in which language the invitation was couched, and Walter wrote a note thanking Princess Brancaleone for her kindness in asking his wife and himself, and saying that they

should both be delighted to come, as he was anxious to present Hilda to her.

Hilda looked forward with some curiosity to meeting Princess Brancaleone. She had often heard of her as the beautiful Mrs. Vesey who had married a prominent Roman magnate, and, until Lady Merton and Mrs. St. Leger had represented her as a person to be avoided, she had never heard anything but praise of her. Mr. Shirley, she remembered, had been enthusiastic on the subject of Princess Brancaleone when he was at Abbotsbury, and Hilda had become sufficiently acquainted with him to know that he was not given to enthusiasm where women were concerned. She recollected that he had declared Princess Brancaleone to be his ideal of a great lady who understood the responsibilities of her position, and that the Prince was *grand seigneur* in the same sense of the term. She had been, therefore, considerably surprised at hearing so different an account from Lady Merton, and her curiosity was aroused as to why the latter should have so bad an opinion of her. Walter had declined to enlighten her on the subject, though she had ended by telling him that Lady Merton had solemnly warned her against Princess Brancaleone as 'a very dangerous woman,' and had more than hinted that the danger applied to himself or to any man who might fall under her influence. The account of Lady Merton's warning had moved her husband to laughter, and all that Hilda could induce him to say was that she must judge of the Princess for herself when she knew her.

When the hour came for them to go to the Palazzo Montelupi, and they were driving down the brilliantly lighted Via Nazionale and Corso Vittorio Emanuele,

Hilda confessed to feeling rather nervous. It was the first time that she had ever been into foreign society, and she was beset by the fear of saying or doing the wrong thing. Walter smilingly reassured her. The only thing which he begged her to remember was, that the man who took her in to dinner would also offer her his arm to take her back to the drawing-room when the meal was over.

'So do not look at him as if you thought he was going to commit an assault on you, as most English-women who are not used to this custom look at their unfortunate neighbour under the circumstances,' he had added, laughing.

Lord Redman thought that his wife had no cause to feel anxious as to her appearance. Hilda was very well dressed and wore some beautiful jewels, and she was looking extremely pretty.

The carriage turned out of the main thoroughfare into a network of narrow streets, where cobblers and watchmakers were plying their trade, and could be seen bending over their work by the light of old-fashioned oil-lamps. Picturesque figures, with mantles of green cloth and foxes' fur wrapped close around them to keep out the keen *tramontana* wind, drew back to avoid being run over, and dark, handsome faces peered in at the carriage windows. Presently they drove into the courtyard of the Palazzo Montelupi, and a gorgeously dressed porter, silver stick in hand, advanced to the carriage door and opened it. As Hilda and her husband ascended the great marble staircase, with its banks of palms and bright-coloured azaleas on each side, and found themselves in the first of the long suite of magnificent rooms on the first floor of the palace,

the former could not help contrasting the space and the beauty around her with the respectable dinginess of their own abode in St. James's Square. It seemed to her that a succession of servants in splendid liveries had ushered them through innumerable apartments, each one more imposing than the last, before they were finally handed over to the care of a stately-looking personage in black, who preceded them into a long and brilliantly-lighted room and announced their names.

Then Hilda saw a tall, beautiful woman with dark hair advancing to meet them with a smile of welcome on her face, and heard Walter saying:

'Let me present my wife, Princess.'

'I am so pleased; it was really kind of you to come at such short notice, Lady Redman. Lodovico, I want to present you to Lady Redman; you already know Lord Redman, I think?'

It was a singularly soft, musical voice, and the English was spoken with that somewhat slow, deliberate intonation which suggested that the Princess was more accustomed to speak in other languages than in her own native tongue. After a few more words of cordial welcome from her hostess, Hilda was presented to all the members of the party assembled in the room, and Prince Brancaleone performed the same ceremony by Walter. There were some sixteen or eighteen guests besides themselves, and Hilda noticed that she and her husband were the only English present. Though she did not understand any Italian, she could, for an Englishwoman, speak French very fairly well, and the conversation appeared to be conducted almost entirely in that language. Dinner was announced presently, and Prince Brancaleone took in one of the

Ambassadresses to the Quirinal, while Hilda found herself placed by the man who had escorted her, whose name she had vainly endeavoured to catch when he was introduced, on the other side of her host.

There was certainly no stiffness or formality about the dinner-parties at the Palazzo Montelupi, and Prince Brancaleone proved to be a very pleasant neighbour. Hilda found the rapidity with which he passed from French to English in his conversation a little confusing at first, but she soon became used to it, and there was a general atmosphere of ease and kindly hospitality which quickly dispelled any feeling of shyness.

She was lost in admiration of the beautiful decorations of the dining-room, and could hardly take her eyes off the gorgeous frescoes of the ceiling and the painted freize which ran round the walls of the apartment.

'The ceiling is by Giulio Romano,' said Prince Brancaleone, in answer to her inquiries; and Hilda found him extremely well-informed on the art treasures of Rome. He gave her, moreover, some useful advice as to what to go to see, and what to avoid going to see, in the Eternal City.

After dinner Princess Brancaleone came and sat down by her. Hilda thought that she had never met any woman who had made so agreeable an impression upon her on a first acquaintanceship, and she could not help wondering why Lady Merton and Mrs. St. Leger had been so severe in their remarks. On one point, however, Lady Merton had certainly been right: Princess Brancaleone was beautifully dressed, and the only jewels which she wore—a single *rivière* of diamonds round her neck—were magnificent. They found many

friends in common to talk about, and particularly Mr. Shirley, for whom the Princess seemed to have a sincere regard.

'I have known him since I was a girl,' she explained; and then she added with a smile: 'Poor dear Mr. Shirley! his bark is so much worse than his bite. With all his scepticism, there is no one who has a kinder heart, or who does more generous actions.'

'You know my grandmother, Lady Merton, do you not?' Hilda asked her presently.

Princess Brancaleone smiled.

'Very slightly,' she replied. 'We meet very rarely in the world, and, of course, she would not come here, were I to ask her.'

'Why not?' asked Hilda.

Her hostess looked surprised.

'Well,' she answered, 'Lady Merton, I have always heard, is very Black, and does not approve of our political opinions. Like most of our English converts, she is very extreme in her views. They believe what the priests and the clerical newspapers tell them, and regard us Liberals as heretics. They are quite ignorant of all that relates to this country, of course, and look at everything through the spectacles of the sacristy.'

'I see,' replied Hilda thoughtfully. 'I am quite ignorant of this country myself,' she added, with a smile, 'but I do not think that I have any prejudices. You are very much interested in politics, are you not, Princess?'

Princess Brancaleone laughed merrily.

'I?' she exclaimed. 'I detest them! Lodovico,' she called to her husband, who happened to be near them, 'what do you think—am I a politician?'

'Well,' remarked the Prince, 'if you are, Elena, I have never discovered it!'

There was a general laugh at his reply among those who had overheard the Princess's question.

'Now, I wonder,' she continued, 'why you thought that, Lady Redman. My husband is in Parliament, and he is keenly interested in politics, but I—no, certainly not! they are not a woman's province. We women are better occupied in our own sphere; there is so much for us to do in it, especially here in Italy.'

At this moment the doors at the end of the room were thrown open, and several people entered. The Princess rose from the sofa on which she and Hilda were sitting, and went forward to receive them. After this fresh visitors were constantly arriving, and soon there were some fifty or sixty people scattered about the rooms, while a general buzz of conversation pervaded them. Both the Princess and her husband repeatedly brought up people and presented Hilda to them. She was soon surrounded by a little group, and new-comers instantly inquired who *la belle dame Anglaise* with the beautiful hair and the fine diamonds might be.

Presently the Prince approached her, followed by an ecclesiastic dressed in the black cassock stitched with red, and the violet mantle worn by the monsignori when out in the world.

'Madame,' he said to her in French, 'permit me to present to you an old friend of ours, Monsignor Martini, a great admirer of your country.'

Hilda rose from her seat, and held out her hand with a smile.

'My husband and I are bearers of a letter of intro-

duction to Monsignor Martini from our mutual friend Mr. Shirley,' she replied, smiling.

Monsignor Martini bowed as he shook hands with her.

'I must apologize,' he said, 'for not having returned Lord Redman's visit, but I was out of Rome until this afternoon, when I found his card and Mr. Shirley's letter.'

He spoke in excellent English, with scarcely a trace of accent. Hilda looked at him with some attention, and was struck by his frank and benevolent expression of countenance. She moved a little on her sofa in order to make room for him, and Monsignor Martini sat down by her.

He was a man of middle height, with iron-gray hair, which was already turning to white upon his temples. The face was one of extreme refinement—a refinement which bore about it the stamp of nature, and was unmarred by the traces of severity so often visible in that produced by asceticism. The mouth was gentle though firm, and the heavy, loose lips and disagreeable lines at the corners of them, so common to the priesthood, were features altogether absent from it. Perhaps Monsignor Martini's eyes were the most remarkable part of his face, after the gentle benevolence of his expression. They were brown eyes, deep and penetrating, yet at the same time soft and kindly in their glance—eyes that inspired confidence, and spoke of sympathy and an understanding of humanity.

'And so, Lady Redman, you are in Rome for the first time?' he said, looking at Hilda with his steady, tranquil gaze. 'Well, I envy you. I am not going to ask you tiresome questions about your impressions of it.'

Hilda smiled.

'And why not, Monsignore?' she asked.

'Because,' returned Monsignor Martini quietly, 'I do not care to hear them. First impressions of Rome are worth nothing at all.'

Hilda felt convinced that she should like her new acquaintance. There was something about him which both fascinated and interested her.

'You are a Catholic, I understand,' he said to her presently.

'Yes,' replied Hilda.

'But Lord Redman—he is not so?'

'No.'

'And you have come to Rome to gain the indulgences of the Anno Santo, no doubt?'

'I have come to see Rome.'

Monsignor Martini looked at her somewhat more attentively.

'And you will see it,' he replied. 'Yes,' he continued, almost as though he were speaking to himself, 'you will see Rome in one of her most interesting phases. Are you medieval in your tastes, Lady Redman?'

'I really do not know,' answered Hilda, smiling. 'Not particularly so, I think.'

'That is a pity,' remarked Monsignor Martini. 'One should have medieval tastes in order properly to appreciate Rome in the year 1900.'

Hilda glanced at him. It was difficult to tell whether he was speaking seriously or not.

'I have really seen nothing of Rome as yet,' she said. 'We only arrived two days ago. Of course I have been to St. Peter's, and yesterday afternoon, after

leaving our letter for you, we went for a lovely drive in the Campagna.'

Monsignor Martini's eyes lightened.

'Ah!' he said. 'I see that you are wise, Lady Redman. Most people would have gone to the Pincio. And what do you think of our Roman Campagna?'

'Is not that a tiresome question, Monsignore?' asked Hilda.

Monsignor Martini laughed—a laugh of quiet amusement.

'A very fair retort,' he replied. 'But the Campagna is not Rome. It is the work of God—not that of man. I should like to hear your first impressions of it, for you will probably not have occasion to change them.'

'Well,' said Hilda, 'it is beautiful, but it gave me an impression of infinite sadness. You will laugh at me, Monsignore, but I felt surrounded by death.'

'I do not laugh at you at all. You are quite right. In the Campagna one is surrounded by the dead. Dead civilizations, vanished races——'

'A dead religion.'

Monsignor Martini interrupted her.

'A dead religion? Oh no, Lady Redman! there you are mistaken. No religion dies.'

Hilda was about to ask him what he meant when her husband approached them.

'Walter,' she exclaimed, as, seeing her engaged in conversation with an ecclesiastic, he was about to pass on, 'this is Monsignor Martini. Let me introduce my husband to you, Monsignore,' she added, and the two men shook hands with each other.

'And tell me about my friend Mr. Shirley,' said Monsignor Martini. 'Have you seen him lately? and

is he coming to Rome this spring? Ah! Lord Redman, there is a man with a head—a head to think and a heart to feel. So few people have both.'

'You admire him so much?' asked Walter Redman, looking at the priest curiously. 'And yet,' he added, 'I should have thought that you would be utterly opposed to his views, Monsignore.'

Monsignor Martini twitched his violet silk mantle a little impatiently.

'I do not care about his views,' he replied; 'they are for himself, and for those who think as he does. You ask me why I admire him? Well, I admire him for not pretending to believe in Christianity when he does not really do so. I admire him, also, because he is probably a better man without Christianity than he would be with it. In these days such natures are interesting to study.'

'They are not so uncommon as people like to think,' said Walter. 'If I may venture to say so,' he added, with a smile, 'such liberal sentiments as those which you have just expressed are uncommon, especially among the clergy.'

'I must re-echo your own objection,' said Monsignor Martini; 'they are not so uncommon as people like to think.'

'The laity seldom hear them.'

'Ah! as to that,' replied Monsignor Martini, with a twinkle of suppressed merriment in his eyes, 'it is not considered expedient. We do not—what is your English proverb?—wash our dirty linen in public.'

Lord Redman laughed.

'I suppose,' he said, 'that you are afraid of offending your weaker brethren?'

'No,' replied Monsignor Martini dryly. 'We are far more afraid, as a rule, of offending our stronger brethren.'

The distant notes of stringed instruments came to their ears at that moment, and several people rose from their seats and moved into the other rooms.

'The Princess generally has music on her Thursday evenings,' said Monsignor Martini. 'She is very fond of it, but she often has it out of charity, as well as out of love for it. She is very kind to struggling artists, and gives them an opportunity of being heard in her house.'

'What a beautiful woman she is!' said Hilda; 'and Prince Brancaleone also is extremely good-looking.'

'She is one of the most noble women we have in Rome!' replied Monsignor Martini. 'The good she has done with her money and her great position in a quiet and sensible way is enormous. I wish that more of our women were like her. Her husband, too, is worthy of her. And now,' he added, 'if Lady Redman will excuse me, I am going to listen to the music. It is for that I come here on Thursday evenings. I am not very worldly, I am afraid.'

'I hope,' said Hilda, 'that you will come and dine with us quietly some evening. It would be such a pleasure to us, would it not, Walter?'

'It would indeed, Monsignore,' added Lord Redman cordially. 'To-day is Thursday. Could you come on Saturday at half-past eight?'

'I should be delighted.'

'I am so glad,' said Hilda. 'You will not mind if we are alone, or nearly so? You see, we are unknown people in Rome.'

'I shall enjoy myself the more if you are quite alone,' replied Monsignor Martini, smiling. 'On Saturday, then, at half-past eight'; and, bowing over Hilda's extended hand, he left them and made his way towards the room where the music was going on, into which none were supposed to enter who wished to talk; for Princess Brancaleone, notwithstanding her British birth, had better taste, and better manners towards the artists, than to tolerate conversation in the same room where music was being performed.

CHAPTER XIX

'No, Hilda,' said Lord Redman decidedly, 'I'll be hanged if I'll go! I didn't come to Rome to attend old ladies' tea-parties. The sight of the women at that embassy last night curtseying and bowing to the priests, and hanging upon every word they said, as though they were men inspired, made me feel sick.'

'But, Walter, grandmamma will be dreadfully offended.'

'Then she must get over it,' returned Walter Redman. 'I was introduced to one tiresome woman after another last night, chiefly English and all impossible; and the men were worse than the women. By Jove!' he added, drawing a long breath, 'I never saw such a set of bounders as the men!'

Hilda laughed in spite of herself, though she felt sure that Lady Merton would resent her husband's absence from the tea-party which she was giving that Saturday afternoon, in order, as she had told her granddaughter markedly, to introduce her and Walter to some of the respectable Catholic society of the place. She had sent them cards for an evening party given the night before by one of the Ambassadresses to the Holy See, who, she declared, had expressed a great desire to make their acquaintance. Both Lord and Lady Redman had been quite ready, after the pleasant evening which they had spent at the Palazzo Montelupi, to

essay the Black world under Lady Merton's wing. The result had not been satisfactory. The Redmans had found themselves in the midst of a society which had appeared to them to be a strange mixture of ecclesiastics and English people of the middle class, with a sprinkling of Romans and of other nationalities. Neither Walter Redman nor Hilda liked being toadied, and the attentions of Mrs. St. Leger and her friends, whose acquaintance she insisted on their making, had at first bored and then annoyed them. Madame de Hohenthal had discoursed to Walter of her friendship with half the well-known people of England, without being at all aware that in some cases she was talking to him of his near relatives, and of her intimacy with English and Continental royalty generally. His patience being at length exhausted, Lord Redman had told her that for his part he would walk a quarter of a mile to avoid meeting a royalty, whereat she had stared at him with ill-concealed astonishment and contempt, and had concluded that he was a socialist.

Lady Merton was in her favourite element that evening. She purred to Cardinals and dignitaries of the Vatican, who were among the guests of the Ambassadress, while she received a considerable amount of homage from the English converts, and a certain attention from the prominent Romans of the Black party, who saw in her a zealous disseminator in England of their political ideas. She presented her grand-daughter to various Princes of the Church and other ecclesiastics, and also to some of the principal ladies of the Black world in Rome. It was evident to Hilda that she and Walter were regarded with a certain interest, but she wished that some other topic of conversation could be found

than the Anno Santo, the pilgrims, and the prescribed visits to the basilicas in order to gain the indulgences. The ease and simplicity which had been a characteristic of the gathering at the Palazzo Montelupi were altogether absent, and it seemed as though everyone were acting a part, and trying to outdo his or her neighbour in orthodoxy.

The end of it had been that Walter had grown uncontrollably restive, and had insisted upon going away. As they drove homeward through the Piazza di Spagna, and up the steep hill of the Quattro Fontane, he had vowed that he would never go to another Black entertainment, declaring that if Hilda liked to do so she would have to go alone, and that he would go to a theatre.

As for Lady Merton's tea-party, he would not hear of it. Hilda must go, of course, and she could tell him how she had enjoyed herself when she returned.

And so Hilda went. She made what excuses she could for her husband, but when she looked round the room she could not blame him for his decision to stop away. She saw a predominant number of her own sex, two or three English priests, and a few men who, for some reason or other, were not priests.

'And how do you like Rome?' said Madame de Hohenthal to her.

They were all seated about the tea-tables, and Hilda's wants were being ministered to by one of the untonsured men.

'I have not been here long enough to judge,' she replied.

'It is such a privilege to be in Rome this year,' said Mrs. St. Leger, with a sigh.

'Hilda,' said Lady Merton from the tea-table, 'we are all very much astonished to hear that you and Walter dined with Prince and Princess Brancaleone the other night.'

Hilda was conscious of many pairs of eyes being fixed upon her.

'Yes,' she replied; 'we had an extremely pleasant evening. What a magnificent house it is! We have nothing in London which can the least compare with it. Of course you know it, madame?'

Madame de Hohenthal shuddered.

'I? My dear Lady Redman! We, who trust that we are good Catholics, do not visit such people as Prince and Princess Brancaleone! You are a stranger to Rome, and cannot be expected to know——'

'A stranger may be forgiven for not feeling much interest in political differences,' said Hilda, smiling.

'Nobody is a stranger in Rome who is a Catholic,' said Father Remington.

'So true—so beautifully true!' murmured Lady Merton. 'I do not think,' she continued, 'that you know Father Remington, Hilda, except of course by name as one of our most valued converts. Father Remington is preaching a series of sermons at San Silvestro for English-speaking Catholics. But with regard to Princess Brancaleone, she is not a person whose set is a very desirable one for you to fall into.'

'She has done untold harm in Rome,' said the Ambassadress at whose house Hilda had been the night before, 'and not in Rome only, but wherever her husband has property.'

'And, besides, her antecedents,' added Madame de

Hohenthal; 'they are more than questionable. I do not mean as to birth, of course; but everybody knows that her first husband was on the point of divorcing her when he died by an accident, and before he had altered his will; so she got all his money, after having behaved disgracefully to him.'

'But Lady Redman cannot be expected to understand all these things,' observed Mrs. St. Leger.

'Did you know her in England?' asked Madame de Montaña, the Ambassadress.

'My husband has known her for some years,' replied Hilda.

Madame de Hohenthal glanced significantly at Mrs. St. Leger.

'She is the sort of woman whom everybody's husband has known for some years,' she remarked.

Hilda coloured, and was about to reply. Then she checked herself, and gave Madame de Hohenthal a haughty little stare, which the latter, being extremely short-sighted, did not see.

'I am sure,' said Lady Merton to the company generally, 'that my grand-daughter would not knowingly go to anti-Catholic houses in Rome, and still less would she wish to encourage her husband to do so. We must remember that Lord Redman is not as yet a Catholic. He cannot be expected to understand the feeling with which loyal subjects of the Holy Father regard those who, like Prince Brancaleone and his wife, have turned against their lawful Sovereign and our holy religion.'

'And yet,' observed Hilda quietly, 'my husband and I met a Catholic priest among Princess Brancaleone's guests.'

'A priest!' exclaimed several of those around her in

astonishment. 'What priest could you have met in that house?'

'Lady Redman probably refers to Monsignor Martini. I believe that he is a frequent visitor at the Palazzo Montelupi,' said Father Remington in smooth, level tones.

Hilda glanced at him, and made a rapid mental comparison between Monsignor Martini's kindly, intellectual countenance, and that of Father Remington, which was not to the advantage of the latter.

'Yes,' she replied, 'Monsignor Martini. I thought him a most interesting man. I am glad to say that he is dining with us to-night.'

'Monsignor Martini!' exclaimed Lady Merton. 'Oh, my dear child, you do indeed require somebody at your side to advise you in Rome! Why, the man is disgraced—a suspended priest!'

'Pardon me, dear Lady Merton,' said Father Remington, 'but Monsignor Martini is not suspended *a divinis;* he is forbidden to preach in the diocese of Rome on account of his subversive doctrine and Liberal tendencies.'

'It is almost the same thing,' replied Lady Merton. 'He turned his church into a sort of political meeting-house, and insulted his congregation by asking them to pray for the Italian monarchy—here in Rome!'

'Ah!' said Madame de Hohenthal. 'If it were only his politics which were open to objection!'

'He is certainly not a person of very good repute,' remarked Father Remington; 'but he has powerful friends at the Vatican, otherwise he would not have been let off so easily.'

'You see, Lady Redman, the sort of priest whom

you meet at the Palazzo Montelupi,' said Mrs. St. Leger.

'Yes, Emily,' said Lady Merton, 'you are quite right. A priest who had any sense of respect for his sacred office would not be seen at Princess Brancaleone's receptions. Monsignor Martini is very badly looked upon in Rome, as any one of us could have told you had you made inquiries about him before asking him to dine with you.'

Hilda did not reply, but sat looking from one to the other of Lady Merton's guests with a feeling of disgust in her heart. She had only been a few days in Rome, but already she was beginning dimly to understand that Catholicism here did not mean quite the same thing as in England. She was vaguely conscious of the existence of an element at Rome which, if it existed at all in English Roman Catholicism, was carefully kept in the background, whereas here it appeared to occupy the primary position, and to relegate religion to a secondary place. The want of charity among her co-religionists surprised her, while the readiness to attack the moral characters of those from whom they differed shocked and offended her.

'I hope,' said Mrs. St. Leger to her, 'that Lord Redman is impressed by all he is seeing at Rome. Of course you will take him to witness the extraordinary scenes of piety at the basilicas? How earnestly you must be praying that he may receive the grace to discern the truth! You know,' she continued in an undertone, 'Father Remington has such a marvellous influence with men. He has brought so many young men into the Church; it is his particular gift. It would be such a good thing if he and Lord Redman

could be thrown together. Do not think me presuming, dear Lady Redman, but we all take so much interest in your happiness, for your dear grandmother's sake as well as for your own.'

'And my husband,' asked Hilda—'are you not interested in his conversion for his sake, Mrs. St. Leger? It seems to me that it is a matter which should affect him more than anybody else.'

Mrs. St. Leger cast down her eyes.

'Oh, of course,' she replied, and then she looked at Hilda a little doubtfully, as though uncertain whether the latter's words did not contain some sarcasm. 'Of course, Lord Redman's soul is our first thought, but we all feel so much sympathy for you. Now, Father Remington is wonderful in these cases. If your husband would only confide his difficulties to him, I am sure that he would not repent having done so. He understands men so well; in fact, he does not like confessing women. Do, dear Lady Redman, make the experiment, and invite Father Remington to your house.'

'Thank you, Mrs. St. Leger,' replied Hilda coldly. 'You are very kind to take so much interest in us both; but I am not in the habit of experimenting upon my husband; and, to tell you the truth, I do not feel in need of any sympathy.'

Mrs. St. Leger looked shocked.

'Oh, my dear Lady Redman!' she began.

Hilda rose from her chair and crossed the room to where Lady Merton was sitting talking to Madame de Hohenthal and Father Remington.

'Surely you are not going to leave us, Hilda?' exclaimed Lady Merton. 'I am expecting several more

people. Monsignor Chester promised to come, and Princess Castelnuovo and her daughters. She is a delightful person. The Castelnuovo are a great Roman house, and, unlike the Brancaleone, they have remained loyal to the Sovereign Pontiff.'

'Thank you, but I really must go,' replied Hilda. She felt that a little more of Mrs. St. Leger and Madame de Hohenthal would cause her to lose her temper.

'Poor thing!' said Madame de Hohenthal, when the door of the drawing-room had closed upon Lady Redman.

'She is very brave about it,' said Mrs. St. Leger, 'but it must be a terrible trial to her.'

'It is a great misfortune that they have come across Monsignor Martini,' observed Father Remington. 'I regard him as a most dangerous man. He is one of those misguided spirits who, as Mivart did, attempt to reconcile Catholic doctrine with the exercise of private judgment. The end of such men is always the same; but how many others do they not drag down with them to everlasting misery!'

'Ah!' sighed Lady Merton; 'how many, indeed!'

'It is a pity,' said Madame de Hohenthal, 'that Lady Redman does not seem to understand what a dangerous friend such a woman as Princess Brancaleone is for a young man like her husband. I must confess I feel very sorry for her when I think that Lord Redman will have every facility here in Rome for resuming what is, no doubt, an old flirtation. Perhaps if she could be made to see the matter in this light, jealousy would make her avoid the Brancaleone set,

and her husband would be thrown more with Catholics. What do you think, dear Lady Merton?'

'Possibly,' replied the latter. 'But we have no grounds for saying that anything more than a mere acquaintanceship ever existed between Lord Redman and Princess Brancaleone.'

'If it is not true, so much the better,' returned Madame de Hohenthal. 'There surely can be no harm in making use of Lady Redman's affection for her husband in order to protect him against a very mischievous *entourage*—do you think so, Father Remington?'

'Considering the ultimate aim in view,' replied Father Remington slowly, 'and the fact that Lord Redman's conversion to the Church would be imperilled by intimacy with Liberals like Prince and Princess Brancaleone and the party by which they are surrounded, I should say, Certainly not. Madame de Hohenthal regards the case from a diplomatic point of view. If diplomacy is sometimes necessary in worldly matters it is surely permissible to employ it when great spiritual interests are at stake.'

'Exactly!' said Madame de Hohenthal.

'But how do you propose to arouse in her a dislike to Princess Brancaleone?' asked Lady Merton.

Madame de Hohenthal smiled.

'It should not be difficult,' she replied, 'as Lady Redman is so devoted to her husband. A word here, and a word there, and doubts will arise in her mind, the more easily as Princess Brancaleone is a good-looking woman.'

'But,' objected Mrs. St. Leger, 'if there is no truth in it all, Lady Redman will not care.'

'Probably not; but Lord Redman will care. He will avoid the Palazzo Montelupi in order to show his wife that there is nothing in the story, and the same end will have been gained.'

'Ah!' said Father Remington, smiling. 'One sees that Madame de Hohenthal has had a diplomatic training.'

CHAPTER XX

BOTH Hilda and her husband found that the favourable impression which Monsignor Martini had made upon them increased on their becoming better acquainted with him. Notwithstanding Lady Merton's remonstrances with her grand-daughter, he was their constant companion in their visits to the churches, galleries, and antiquities of Rome. The fund of information which he possessed, his intimate acquaintance with the art treasures of the Eternal City, and his knowledge of classic and medieval Rome, caused him to be a most useful guide, while the breadth of his mental vision and a certain quiet sense of humour made his companionship at once instructive and amusing. Walter Redman and he rapidly became great friends, and found in each other a common bond of sympathy with, and interest in, the social problems of life.

As Mr. Shirley had said was the case, Monsignor Martini had travelled much. His knowledge of England and the English character was as remarkable as his complete command of the English tongue, and his Italian quickness of perception, coupled with a considerable element of that spirit of satire which has ever been engrained in the Roman nature, often added a pungency to his observations which Walter was very capable of appreciating.

Hilda regarded the increasing intimacy between her husband and Monsignor Martini with secret satisfaction. Hitherto she had observed that it was sufficient for a man to belong to the clergy of any denomination for Walter to shut himself up in an impenetrable reserve when in his company, and to assume a courteous indifference to spiritual matters which she knew he was very far from feeling. It was this indifference which Father Galsworthy had so much deplored, and which he had truly described as the most unassailable form of Protestantism.

Since she had been able freely to talk to him on such subjects, she had more than once expostulated with him on this attitude, which, she had frankly told him, was both unfair and narrow-minded. He should at least hear what the men from whom he differed had to say in support of their own doctrines and systems. Walter assured her that he had not assumed it without cause or provocation. He had often, he told her, attempted to discuss religious difficulties with ecclesiastics, both Catholic and Protestant, but the result had not been satisfactory. They had invariably entrenched themselves behind dogma, and when this entrenchment was no longer defensible, they had retreated and raised up another, and called it the Holy Ghost. From the shelter of this last position arguments were no longer necessary. Assertions were employed instead, and discussion became impossible.

Hilda was obliged to confess to herself that Walter was not altogether misstating the facts of the situation, and she found it hard to reply to the objection.

As the weeks passed in Rome, she realized more and more clearly that were her husband to see much of

Lady Merton and the set by which the latter was surrounded, his prejudices against dogmatic religion generally, and Catholicism in particular, would inevitably become stronger than ever. Her own faith, moreover, had been severely tried by much that she had seen and heard in Rome. Regarding Lady Redman as one of themselves, the Catholics whom she met in the houses of Lady Merton and her friends had not considered it to be necessary to moderate their opinions in her presence. Indeed, they had talked before her with the object of demonstrating that the Church in Italy was persecuted, and that nobody could honestly claim to be a Catholic who did not protest against the existing form of government. It was evident to Hilda that religion at the centre of Catholicism was a mere question of party politics, and that the envy, hatred, and uncharitableness to be found in all political arenas existed in their most pronounced and virulent forms among the political faction in Rome which carried on its campaign in the name of Christ.

She had spoken both to Monsignor Martini and to Princess Brancaleone on the subject. A mutual friendship had sprung up between the latter and herself, and the more intimate Hilda became with the Princess, the more indignant she felt when she heard the ill-natured innuendos which her Black acquaintances were never weary of making concerning her and her husband.

The whole object of the Prince and Princess seemed to be to promote the well-being and progress of their less fortunate fellow-creatures. Far from hearing religion treated with contempt and derision, as she had been assured was the case in the Palazzo Montelupi, she could not help noticing that a much greater reverence

and respect was paid to it by her White friends than by her Black ones. It was less talked about, perhaps, but sacred things were not alluded to with the careless irreverence which not unfrequently startled and shocked her when proceeding from ecclesiastics and from those who professed the greatest devotion to the Church. Superstitious observances and manifest impostures were honestly condemned by those whom she heard designated as traitors and bad Catholics by the devotees whom she met in such houses as Lady Merton's. Their degrading influence on the lower orders was sorrowfully admitted and deplored; they were not dismissed with a shrug of the shoulders and a cynical admission that the mob must believe in something, and that the shrines where such impostures were practised brought money to the coffers of the Church; or, worse still, declared with hypocritical insistence to be holy miracles by those who privately scoffed at them.

Hilda had poured forth some of her perplexities, and some of her disillusions, into Princess Brancaleone's ears; and the latter had gazed at her with a quiet smile on the beautiful face which looked so happy and peaceful, and yet, Hilda thought, as if its owner had known sorrow and unhappiness in the past.

'You are learning the meaning of our Roman proverb, "The nearer the Church, the further from God,"' the Princess had said to her. 'I had to learn it also when I became a Roman by marriage. We are pagans here. It is only when it gets far away from the influences of the Vatican, with its miasma of worldly intrigue and ambitions, that Catholicism becomes a spiritual power. Ask Monsignor Martini; he is a priest, and a good man. He knows Rome as few men know it, and he

remains a Catholic priest. A weaker man than he would have left the Church.'

In the course of their excursions together about the city, and expeditions into the Campagna and the Alban Hills, Hilda had many conversations with Monsignor Martini. At first she had rather avoided any mention of religion to him, thinking that it would bore her husband or cause him to suspect that she and the priest were talking at him.

It was Walter himself, however, who appeared anxious to hear Monsignor Martini's views, and that he should be so was a proof to his wife that he regarded them as worthy of attention. She desired nothing better than that he should listen to the ideas of an enlightened and broad-minded man who was at the same time a priest of the Roman Church, and the fact that Monsignor Martini had incurred the displeasure of the Vatican did not weigh with her so greatly as it would have done before her visit to Rome. That Walter would ever become a Catholic she had ceased to hope; but it might be that a man like Monsignor Martini, with his broad sympathies, and faith in the spirit of Christianity rather than in the letter of dogmatic teaching, would open out a way to that reconciliation between his reason and some settled form of religious belief and trust of which she was convinced that her husband stood more in need than he was conscious of being.

It was the first week of April, and spring was rushing with great strides over the land, as spring in Italy does. The very air felt tingling and quivering with the Spirit of Life. The billowy green plains of the Roman Campagna were sweet with the scent of wild flowers,

starred with jonquils, or clothed here and there as with drifts of newly-fallen snow, where patches of delicate narcissi gleamed white in the hollows and on the slopes of the broken banks. The ghostly asphodel sighed and rustled as the light breeze passed over it, as though whispering a message to the dead, and to the forgotten gods of the past. In every spot where man had spared trees or left a thicket a nightingale trilled, and overhead, from somewhere far up in the turquoise-coloured sky, came floating earthwards the ceaseless song of larks.

Walter and Hilda had spent the day at Nemi, and wandering among the chestnut and oak woods of Genzano. They had left Rome early that morning, and Monsignor Martini accompanied them. The latter was always ready to join them on an expedition into the country. The love of nature was another taste which he shared in common with Walter Redman, and one which had been the means of drawing the two more closely together. The Redmans often thought that he talked more freely when he had left the walls of Rome behind him.

The three were sitting beneath a group of ancient olive-trees, whence they could see the sun sinking slowly downwards to the silver line of the Mediterranean glittering in the west, and the purple shadows creeping across the plain to where the cupola of St. Peter's rose through the golden haze, showing where Rome lay. From the vineyards and orchards on the slopes below came the voices of the peasants, singing as they worked the mournful Romanesco songs, with their pathetic minor cadences suggestive of Eastern origin.

'I think,' said Lord Redman, 'that one of the pleasantest things in Rome is being able to get out of it.'

Monsignor Martini smiled.

'That is rather what you call a bull, is it not?' he replied; 'but I quite agree with you, and so did the old Romans. Their descendants,' he added, 'as a rule do not love the country.'

'You are an exception, Monsignore,' said Hilda.

'It is the old paganism coming out in him,' observed her husband, smiling. 'Its spirit is too strong to be conquered, even by the Church.'

'The Church has, very wisely, never attempted to conquer it,' replied Monsignor Martini. 'In this country we are all pagans at heart,' he continued, 'and the Church assimilates our paganism, and seeks to direct it into deeper and purer channels. If Christianity would honestly admit its debt to paganism, there would be fewer incredulous Christians in the world.'

Hilda turned and looked at him earnestly.

'Oh,' she exclaimed, 'I am glad to hear you say that; it explains so many things in Rome which have——'

'Distressed you,' interrupted Monsignor Martini gently, as she paused. 'I have known many Catholics who have been distressed at what they see in this Italy of ours, and many Protestants who have been scandalized. You, Lady Redman, are one of the former. You have been more perplexed than edified by what you have seen in Rome, have you not?'

'Yes,' answered Hilda simply; 'but how do you know, Monsignore?'

'Your face is not a very hard one to read,' he replied, 'and as to your perplexity, it is as natural as the disgust of the Protestants. You do not understand our paganism, that is all.'

'May I speak plainly?' asked Hilda.

'We are not in Rome,' said Monsignor Martini, looking beyond her to where in the far distance the sun was shining on the golden cross of St. Peter's.

'Well,' returned Hilda, 'it is a shock to find that paganism is not dead. It seems to me that one is reminded of it at every turn.'

Monsignor Martini shrugged his shoulders.

'Pan never died,' he said. 'Some foolish people have said and thought that he did; but it is not true. He and the gods live on. Does that shock you so much?'

'The superstition shocks me; it all seems to be so material,' said Hilda. 'One cannot help wondering whether the uneducated people do not lose sight of the truth when it is surrounded by so much symbolism.'

'They are superstitious — grossly superstitious,' answered Monsignor Martini, 'but in all superstition there is a far-off whisper of truth. Our paganism should not shock you. Remember that the Roman Church is the residuary legatee of the Roman Empire, and that she has given civilization to the world. What would you give us, Lord Redman,' he added, turning suddenly to the latter, 'instead of our superstitions?'

Walter had been listening attentively to the conversation between his wife and the ecclesiastic. It was the first time that he had heard Hilda remark upon the impressions which her visits to the Roman Churches had left upon her mind, and her words had confirmed

his suspicions that these impressions had not been entirely satisfactory.

'I cannot argue the matter with you, Monsignore,' he said after a pause.

'And why not? Because I am a priest, I suppose!'

'Indirectly, yes. One cannot discuss the gods with a creator of God.'

Monsignor Martini's eyes contracted a little, and then the expression of a great reverence overspread his features.

'Ah!' he replied in a low tone. 'That is a mystery into which I, a priest, dare not seek to penetrate. The Church has willed that we should accept a material as well as a spiritual interpretation of it. Why do you introduce it into our present discussion, Lord Redman?'

He looked round him uneasily as he spoke, though the three were alone together under the olive-trees. The cuckoos were calling to each other in the woods above them, the cicale shrilled at their feet, and Rome was far away, yonder where the haze was denser, and only the great dome, poised between heaven and earth, marked the site of the Eternal City.

Walter Redman raised himself into a sitting posture, his back against one of the gnarled, moss-covered stems of the olives.

'I did not introduce it,' he said, looking at the priest. 'It introduces itself into any discussion upon your creed. How could it be otherwise? To you, and to those like you, Monsignore, it is given to work a stupendous miracle—a thing before which the human imagination reels and shrinks back awe-stricken. What can the old gods be to such as you, who, by speaking certain

words, and making certain signs, can hold in the hollow of your hand the flesh and the blood of the Creator of the universe?'

'It is a mystery,' repeated Monsignor Martini; 'and the words of Christ but veil some deeper mystery still —the Mystery of Life. Were the corn god and the wine god not worshipped and sacrificed here where we are sitting? Did Christ speak a new thing, or did He not rather set His seal upon a hidden truth which is as old as the world itself? No, Lord Redman! The old gods are dear to me inasmuch as they prefigure those eternal truths of which the Catholic Church of to-day is the depository. The ancient faiths had their divine element, though they lacked a Christ. We Latins have grafted the rose of Christianity on the briar of Paganism, but the stock is the same.'

'But surely,' interposed Hilda, 'you would not compare the two systems?'

'No,' replied Monsignor Martini, 'I would not, so far as the good effect which they have had on mankind is concerned, for there can be no comparison. Christianity, when true to itself, has a more ennobling influence on human nature than the purest forms of paganism ever exercised. But our Christianity is not true to itself. It is of Cæsar, not of Christ. That is why you find yourself perplexed in Rome, Lady Redman; but there is no reason why you should be shocked.'

'It is so different with us in England.'

'Of course it is. Your English Catholicism is Roman only in name. Here it is Roman in reality. It can no more rid itself of its pagan elements than the grafted rose can rid itself of its briar stock. A political

Christianity has succeeded to a political Paganism, that is all. Leo XIII. has succeeded to the Cæsars.'

'Then you do not consider Christianity to be true to itself in Rome?' asked Walter.

Monsignor Martini paused for a moment.

'Was Paganism true to itself in Rome?' he remarked presently. 'It degenerated into a purely political religion. The ancient truths, or semi-truths, were lost sight of in political struggles. Only the superstitions remained among the vulgar. Christianity came and collected the débris, working them into her wider and deeper truths.'

'And now?'

'Now Christianity in this country, and in all Latin countries, is going through the same phase as its precursor. The Roman Emperors created new deities in order to conceal the weakness of the older ones, and to maintain their own authority. The Roman Pontiffs create new dogmas and people heaven with new inhabitants for the same reason. And yet,' continued Monsignor Martini, as if to himself, 'amid all the ambition and the worldliness, behind all the symbolism and the superstition, there shines the light of a Divine truth which even the theologians have been unable wholly to extinguish.'

'And it is that light which makes you cling to the Church?' said Lord Redman, looking at him curiously.

'Yes; I do not wish to go out into the darkness,' replied Monsignor Martini.

'But the Church may drive you into it, Monsignore,' observed Walter, smiling.

'What do you call "the Church"?'

'Surely you admit but one—the body to which you

belong, and whose priest you are? I always understood that the chief credential of the Roman Church was the unity of faith to be found among her members.'

'Yes,' interrupted Hilda; 'and that is what perplexes me at Rome, Monsignore. Is it possible that highly educated ecclesiastics, and cultured men and women, can believe in the religion of the people? And if they do not believe in it, why do they tolerate it, and why does the Church encourage what appears to be a continuation of paganism? Is there one religion for the rich and another for the poor?'

Monsignor Martini sighed.

'Unity of Faith is a misleading term. Unity of allegiance would better express the truth. There never has been Unity of Faith from the time of the Apostles downwards. I am acquainted with Catholic priests, here in Rome, who all but deny the divinity of Christ, and who altogether deny such dogmas as the Immaculate Conception and Papal Infallibility. I know men and women who are devoted Christians, and who utterly repudiate the dogma of Transubstantiation. They are not true Catholics, you say—and the Church says so likewise. But the Church does not cast them out for what they believe or disbelieve, so long as they do not oblige her to do so. Do you suppose that Rome is not clever enough to know her own weakness? If you go among our lower orders, you will find the same divergence of faith. Many believe with unreasoning enthusiasm all that the Church teaches, and more. It is not so long ago since thousands thronged a church in the centre of Rome because a woman declared that a picture in that church had moved its eyes. Do you suppose that these were all Catholics in the Vatican's

sense of the term? I think that if you had questioned a dozen of those people you would not have found three who agreed as to their belief, and you might very easily have failed to find one who could explain to you why he was a Catholic. There is as much difference of religious opinion in the Roman Church as in any other spiritual body, and the Roman Church is perfectly aware of the fact.'

'But why, if there are men and women in all classes, and even ecclesiastics whose reason and intelligence cause them to protest against certain dogmas and irrational doctrines, does the Church crucify some and affect to ignore the majority?' asked Walter.

Monsignor Martini smiled.

'My dear Lord Redman,' he replied, 'in Rome you may think what you please—you may even speak your thoughts aloud, so long as you do not do so in the pulpit. But you must not commit them to print. That will not surprise you, probably.'

'But it does surprise me,' said Hilda.

'No doubt, Lady Redman; you are an English Catholic, and you cannot yet realize that, in Rome, politics take the precedence of religion. Your husband will tell you that a Government does not much care what the individual opinions of its supporters may be so long as the latter vote for it. That is the policy of the Vatican. It was the policy of the Palatine in the days of our predecessors. We know that, in pagan times, every thinking man had a religion of his own—the gods were for the populace, which got what truth out of them it could, and, no doubt, to countless individuals it was given to extract much truth. Unless a cult were suspected of being inimical to the State, it

was ignored by the authorities. So in the Rome of to-day, dogmas and doctrines are dealt out with a free hand to the multitude; superstitions, revived from ancient times, are encouraged and bear financial fruit at a hundred shrines of the Madonna and the Saints, as they did of old at those of the goddesses and the gods. Disbelief and dissent there may be, and disgust among the better educated and the honest, but all will be tolerated except the publishing of it.'

'And the people—those among the multitude who never find the truth concealed amidst the superstition—in what are they better than their pagan ancestors?' asked Hilda.

'In nothing, probably,' said her husband.

'In much!' returned Monsignor Martini hastily. 'The Church has taught them, amongst much superstition, a belief in the future life. The uneducated Christian has a sense of personal responsibility to himself and to his fellows which the uneducated pagan could seldom, if ever, have possessed.'

'Yes,' said Walter thoughtfully, 'that is probably true.'

'It is indisputably true,' replied Monsignor Martini, fixing his soft brown eyes upon him. 'No man can have a proper sense of his responsibility in this world, or of the dignity of human nature, unless he believes in a future state; and, except through the medium of the Church, how can he arrive at a clear understanding of that state?'

'You speak as a Catholic priest,' said Walter.

'No; I speak as a Christian. You asked me a few minutes ago what I called the Church, and I did not answer your question. You assume that, because I am

a priest, I admit no Church outside the Roman communion to be a true Church.'

'That is what the Roman Church asserts,' said Walter.

'The Roman Church,' replied Monsignor Martini slowly, 'asserts many things. For me there is only one Church—that is perfectly true. But for me, again, every human being who accepts the teaching of Christ belongs to that Church. "Whosoever shall do the will of My Father that is in Heaven, he is My brother, and sister, and mother."* There is but one true Church, and of that all are members who, in their different ways, and according to their different lights, are serving their fellow-creatures for the love of God.'

Walter Redman looked across the great plain which lay beneath them. The sun was sinking down to the sea, and all the western sky was aflame. A little later the *Ave Maria* would ring from the churches, and the peasants would leave their fields and vineyards and come up to the villages, for the twilight is short in Italy, and when once the sunset glow has faded, night sinks swiftly over the land.

'I beg your pardon, Monsignore,' he said, turning suddenly to the priest. 'I misjudged you.'

Monsignor Martini smiled.

'Did you? In what way, Lord Redman?' he asked.

'I thought that, as a priest, you would not acknowledge liberty of thought on questions of dogmatic belief.'

Monsignor Martini rose from his seat beneath the olive-tree.

* Monsignor Martini quotes from the Douai translation of the Vulgate.

'Dogma!' he said, a little impatiently. 'We have too much dogma and too little faith. Do you not think that there are many of us who realize this and would say so, if we dared?'

'Then you would imply that a man may be a Christian and yet not belong to any Church?' said Walter. 'And you would consider that man to be as good a Christian in the sight of God as though he were a Catholic?'

'Most assuredly.'

'But he must believe in the great dogmas of Christianity?'

'He must believe and accept the teaching of Christ. Dogmas were evolved from that teaching, but some of them have little to do with it. Come, Lord Redman,' added Monsignor Martini, 'we should be returning to Albano. The sun has set, and it will be dark long before we reach Rome.'

They had taken a little carriage for the day in Albano, intending to drive back from the latter place to Rome in the landau which Walter had hired for the months he and Hilda were going to pass there.

'I will walk on into Genzano and find our driver,' said Lord Redman to his wife, 'if you and Monsignor Martini will follow me.'

Hilda watched his tall figure striding away down the white road.

'I have never heard my husband talk to any ecclesiastic as he does to you, Monsignore,' she said presently. 'I am so very glad that he should do so. He always declares that he has no religion, you know, but it is not true.'

'Nobody could be much in Lord Redman's company

and believe that he has no religion,' replied Monsignor Martini. 'He is one of the many people whom dogma has driven into a feigned indifference.'

Hilda looked at him earnestly.

'Do you really believe that one form of religion is as true as another in the sight of God?'

'I believe that God does not inquire whether we are Romans, or Greeks, or Anglicans,' said Monsignor Martini, with a smile. 'Your husband will never be a Catholic, Lady Redman,' he added. 'I have had many conversations with him. He cannot believe all that would be required of him as a convert. I do not think you could expect him to do so, neither should you allow the fact to distress you.'

'It does not distress me,' replied Hilda.

Monsignor Martini directed a keen glance at her. He was about to reply when a little carriage came round a bend in the road. Walter had met it coming in search of them, as they were nearly an hour later than the time fixed upon to rejoin it at Genzano.

'Are you going to the Canonization in St. Peter's, Monsignore?' asked Walter, as they were rattling over the rough-paved road leading to Albano.

Monsignor Martini shook his head.

'No,' he said. 'I should not apply for a ticket. It would certainly be refused me. I might, I believe, insist upon taking my proper place in the Papal procession, but——' and here he paused significantly.

'I wonder,' said Hilda, 'whether you would come with us? We have three tickets which Cardinal Macchi gave us. It would be so interesting to have you with us to explain the ceremony.'

'I will come with pleasure,' said Monsignor Martini,

after hesitating for a moment or two. 'It is a very curious ceremony,' he added, 'an interesting study of human nature, and an imposing spectacle. You will feel how greatly we are still under the influence of paganism. Instead of a Roman Emperor creating a minor deity, you will see the Roman Pontiff creating a saint.'

'At any rate you will come with us?' said Walter. 'I am not fond of ecclesiastical functions,' he added, 'as you have discovered. But it will be interesting to see how saints are made. I am told by a French friend of mine that the French candidate for celestial honours is a decidedly political candidate. Is this so, Monsignore?'

Monsignor Martini laughed.

'What is the advantage of possessing the keys of heaven if the Vatican cannot use them to oblige a friend?' he replied enigmatically.

CHAPTER XXI

ONE afternoon, a few days after their excursion among the Alban Hills, Hilda was writing letters in the drawing-room of the villa in the Via Gaeta, while Walter Redman was reading by the windows which opened into the little garden partly surrounding the house. The weather, for so late in the spring, was unprecedentedly bad, as, indeed, it had been all the year. The Romans grumbled at the Anno Santo, which, they declared, was the cause of all the rain and the *scirocco* which had spoilt the beautiful Roman spring. Nothing ever prospered in a Holy Year, they averred, and it would be well if some great disaster did not befall Rome and Italy during its course.

Walter had just laid aside his book, and had proposed a walk in spite of the weather, when a footman whom they had brought with them from Abbotsbury entered the room.

'Mr. Russell wants to see you, my lord,' he said.

'Mr. Russell!' exclaimed Walter, in astonishment. 'What Mr. Russell? Not the Rector?'

'Yes, my lord—the Rector. I have shown him into your lordship's sitting-room.'

'Show him in here at once,' said Walter. 'What brings him to Rome, I wonder?' he added as the man left the room. 'Did you know anything of their coming, Hilda?'

'No,' answered the latter; 'I am amazed. I have never heard from Mary since we left England. I have written to her, but she has never replied. I wonder if she is with him.'

The door opened, and the servant announced Mr. Russell.

'Why, Russell,' said Walter, 'this is a surprise. When did you arrive in Rome?'

'Is Mary here?' asked Hilda.

They advanced to meet him with outstretched hands of welcome, but a look on the Rector's face caused them to pause hesitatingly. An expression of mental anguish was reflected on Mr. Russell's usually calm and contented countenance.

'Mary!' exclaimed Hilda. 'Something has happened to her, Mr. Russell? Is she ill? I have been expecting to hear from her for so long.'

Mr. Russell turned from her abruptly.

'Lord Redman,' he said, and his voice trembled with a strongly-repressed emotion, 'I understood that you were alone. I did not wish to intrude upon Lady Redman.'

He spoke with a cold, studied politeness, which caused Walter and his wife to look at each other with astonishment.

'I will leave you and my husband alone together,' Hilda said, a little stiffly. 'I was afraid that something had occurred to distress you, and could only think that perhaps Mary was ill. However, as it is only business which has brought you here——'

Mr. Russell interrupted her.

'Please remain, Lady Redman,' he said coldly; 'but spare me any enquiries about my wife.'

'Good God, Russell!' exclaimed Walter, 'what do you mean? What has happened to Mary? She is not——' He hesitated, and then looked anxiously in the Rector's face.

The latter laughed—a short, bitter laugh which was unpleasant to hear.

'Lady Redman has not told you?' he asked. 'Well, Lord Redman, I am glad of that. I am glad that you, at least, are ignorant of the matter; that you have not allowed this blow to fall upon me without having given me a friendly word of warning. My business with you need not detain us long. Lady Redman is no doubt aware why I am in Rome, and I will leave it to her to explain my presence here. In the meantime, I wish to notify to you my resignation of the living of Abbotsbury. I have already informed the Bishop of my intention to do so.'

Walter stared at him in bewilderment. There was a great anger as well as grief in Mr. Russell's tones. The man would not be so angry if his wife were dead, Lord Redman reflected, and that Mary should have run away from her husband was a thought which provoked a smile. He knew few women more eminently staid and respectable than his cousin, Mary Russell.

He was about to reply when Hilda, who had moved towards the door with the intention of leaving the drawing-room, turned, and came slowly up to where the Rector and her husband were standing.

'Mr. Russell,' she said quietly, 'perhaps you will explain to us what you mean. Your words imply that I am acquainted with some fact relating to Mary of which my husband is in ignorance. Please understand

that, since leaving Abbotsbury, I have heard neither from nor of her.'

Mr. Russell looked at her with an expression in which incredulity and disgust were but ill-concealed. His hands plucked nervously at a little gold cross which hung from his watch-chain.

'I have no doubt, Lady Redman, that you are acting a part which you conscientiously consider to be a right one,' he replied. 'Your priests have probably told you to keep up the deception to the last, but, believe me, it is quite unnecessary. You have succeeded in your task. You have separated a husband and wife, and ruined a happy home. You and your Church should be satisfied.'

Hilda grew very pale.

'Once again, Mr. Russell,' she said with quiet dignity, 'I must ask you to explain yourself.'

'Does it need so much explanation? Under the pretence of friendship for my wife, have you not gradually undermined her faith in her own Church? Have you not worked upon her religious temperament, you, and the priests to whom you sent her, until you succeeded in convincing her that she was pleasing her God by deceiving her husband? Well, what does it matter if the love between a husband and a wife has been shattered, if all the trust and all the sympathy of years has been broken and destroyed? You have made a convert for your Church—the rest signifies nothing.'

Walter Redman turned to his wife.

'Hilda,' he said, in a low voice, 'is this true?'

'Yes,' continued Mr. Russell. 'God help me, it is true! I could have borne anything but the deception

of it, the cruelty of it. I am not a narrow-minded man, Lady Redman; I think you have cause to know that. If you had allowed my wife to take me into her confidence, your Church would have lost nothing; it would have gained my respect instead of my contempt for its methods. If I had been convinced that Mary's happiness and peace of mind depended upon her embracing your creed, I would not have opposed her doing so in the end, though I should have tried to reason with her before the final step was taken. It was this of which you were afraid—this, and a husband's affection. Your Church boasts of crushing human affections, but you might have had some little pity for me, Lady Redman. I pitied you when I believed that you were distressed in your mind, and all the time you were striving secretly to separate my wife from me in this world and the next. You may have been acting the part of a good Catholic—I do not know—but, were you acting that of a good Christian?'

Mr. Russell's voice broke suddenly. Sitting down, he buried his face in his hands.

'Hilda,' exclaimed Lord Redman—'Hilda, let me hear you say that he is mistaken. You have not done this thing; you could not do it. Russell,' he continued, 'my wife is incapable of acting as you suppose. There is some absurd mistake.'

Mr. Russell raised his head.

'There is no mistake,' he said dully. 'Mary used to be very bitter about Roman Catholics. It was a surprise to me that she ceased to be so shortly after Lady Redman came to Abbotsbury, but I was glad that her prejudices should be modified. I knew nothing, suspected nothing. Just after Easter she

went to London, to pay a visit to her own relations. One morning I received a letter from her, telling me that she had been received into the Roman Catholic Church at the Oratory the day before by a Father Galsworthy. She had been "instructed," so she wrote, for some weeks, and had long been contemplating the step. Her spiritual directors, she told me, and others whom she had consulted, had counselled her not to tell me of her intention until her conversion was an accomplished fact. Nothing, she declared—no earthly ties or human affection—could be suffered to interfere between a Catholic and the Church. I have not seen her since.'

'You have not seen her since?' repeated Hilda.

'No, Lady Redman, I could not. It is not that she has changed her faith—God must be the Judge of that—but it is the manner of her changing it, the dishonesty, the heartless cruelty. Can a just action come out of so much evil? I suppose your priests believe that it can. Your grandmother, Lady Merton, wrote to me. She told me that God in His mercy had opened the eyes of my wife to the truth, and had called her into His Church. Daily intercourse with a Catholic, she said, had contributed to this blessed result. That Catholic was, of course, yourself.'

'What grounds have you for supposing so, Mr. Russell?' asked Hilda.

'Lady Merton's letters,' replied Mr. Russell, 'and other evidence. Mary, too, does not deny that you were instrumental in converting her. It would have been kinder to warn me, Lady Redman. In her room I found controversial books—books in which your name was written—lent to her by you, she tells me

in her letters. They were hidden away, as though she had wished to keep their existence in our house a secret.'

'Where is she now?' asked Hilda.

Mr. Russell looked at her indignantly.

'Why need you keep up the comedy any longer?' he answered bitterly. 'You have probably seen her. She is in Rome.'

'In Rome!' exclaimed Walter.

'Yes, in a retreat. So much I, her husband, am allowed to know. No doubt you are acquainted with a certain Father Remington in this town, Lady Redman. It appears that, acting on Lady Merton's and Father Galsworthy's suggestion, Mary came to Rome, and Lady Merton undertook to find a "retreat," as she called it, for her, until—as my wife was pleased to explain to me—Almighty God should see fit to soften my anger against her. I was not angry with her, poor child, but—well, when love and trust are betrayed, it is a hard thing to bear! Perhaps I was ungenerous, but I wrote and told her not to return to the Rectory just then; I wanted to be alone. It was after writing this to her that I received her letter saying she should go to Rome; and since then she has written to tell me that she is here, in a "retreat" conducted by a certain Father Remington, and that she hopes to benefit by the indulgences of the Holy Year. But I do not know why I am telling you things which you already know better than I,' concluded Mr. Russell abruptly.

'Have you seen Lady Merton since you arrived in Rome?' asked Hilda quietly.

She was filled with a great compassion for the Rector

and, in her indignation at the manner in which his wife had treated him, the fact that he regarded her as responsible for his unhappiness seemed of little importance.

'No. I arrived this morning only. My duties at Abbotsbury prevented my coming sooner.'

'And why have you come, Mr. Russell?'

'I have come for Mary,' he answered simply. 'I want to explain to her that I am not angry. I was angry at first that she should have listened to others, and have lost her confidence in me. We must begin life afresh. I cannot return to Abbotsbury.'

'We will talk about that later on,' said Walter Redman gently. 'In the meantime,' he added, 'you are under the impression that Mary has been influenced by my wife?'

'How can I think otherwise? Mary does not deny it. Lady Merton has distinctly given me to understand that Lady Redman's influence has caused her conversion; and I find further proofs of it among my wife's books.'

'And if I deny it?' asked Hilda.

Mr. Russell made no reply.

'Will you listen to me, Mr. Russell?' she continued, after a pause. 'Hitherto I have listened to you without attempting to defend myself. Will you believe me when I tell you that the news of Mary having become a Catholic is as great a surprise to me as it was to you? It cannot be so great a shock, but, all the same, it is a shock; and I am more grieved for you than I can say.'

The Rector looked at her in silence, but it was evident that he did not believe her.

'The books you found were mine,' she continued, 'and I lent them to her. When I first came to Abbotsbury we used to talk about the differences in our religions, and I was astonished to find how greatly Mary was prejudiced against the Roman Church, and how very ignorant she was of its tenets. She used to tell me the most absurd things of what she imagined that we believed. I lent her those books at her own request. By degrees she ceased to mention the subject to me, and I concluded that she wished to avoid it. Afterwards,' and here Hilda glanced at her husband, 'events happened which made me less inclined than ever to discuss religious differences. I was surprised to learn that Mary had visited my grandmother at Ware. I first heard of this visit from you; Mary never alluded to it. In fact, to be brief, I am absolutely innocent of any attempt or desire to make Mary abandon the Church of England, and I must decline to be held responsible in any way for the action of other people. I think, Mr. Russell, my husband will tell you that I am speaking the truth when I say that I strongly condemn any interference with the religious opinion of others, whether it proceeds from Catholics or Protestants.'

'Russell,' exclaimed Walter warmly, 'you must dismiss from your mind any suspicion of my wife having been a party to this business. She is incapable of it. Nobody knows that better than I do. If you will reflect for a moment, you will see what I mean.'

Mr. Russell hesitated.

'I would give much to believe it,' he said. 'Lady Redman and I have always been good friends, and

the feeling that she has known of all this from the beginning, and has been the instigator of it, has made the blow a harder one still to bear.'

'Mr. Russell,' said Hilda, 'I declare to you upon my honour that I have had no part, direct or indirect, in the step Mary has taken, save the wholly innocent one of having attempted to disabuse her mind of certain foolish prejudices, and of having, at her own request, lent her some books on the position of the Roman Church.'

Lady Redman spoke in clear, firm tones which carried conviction with them. Mr. Russell looked at her keenly for some seconds.

'If I have misjudged you,' he said quietly, 'I beg your forgiveness, Lady Redman. I thought that zeal for your Church had caused you to forget all other things. My wife's letters to me are full of allusions to the duty of a Catholic to give up, if necessary, all human affections for the sake of Christ. She means for the sake of the Church she has joined, but that is no matter. Submission and obedience to the counsels of her confessor, Father Galsworthy, she assures me, made her keep all her intentions secret from her husband until she had actually been received into the Roman Catholic Church. I have read that a wife should cleave unto her husband, and surely she should not desert her husband's faith for another. But you are a Catholic, Lady Redman. I cannot expect you to sympathize with me. Your sympathies will be with the soul which has been rescued to the Church.'

Hilda suddenly burst into tears.

'It is hateful!' she exclaimed, struggling to regain the mastery over herself. 'Is there no truth or loyalty

anywhere? Does religion destroy honour? Mr. Russell,' she continued, with a little sob, 'I abhor what your wife has done. Do you understand me?—I abhor it, and those who have made her do it.'

Walter sprang to her side.

'Hush, Hilda, hush!' he said. 'Russell knows now that you have no hand in it.'

Since her illness the year before he had not seen his wife so excited.

'Get Mary away from those people,' she continued, scarcely heeding him. 'Get her away from them, or they will make her destroy your happiness and her own, and they will tell her that she is doing a righteous act. Do you think they care for her soul or for yours? They want converts—money, numbers, to swell the influence of the Church!'

'Hilda——!'

'No, Walter; let me speak! I have thought so much all these months—you do not know how much! They want you, Walter; they cannot wait for your child. But they shall have neither. I will not have my child—your child—brought up a Catholic.'

Walter Redman thought that he had never seen his wife look so beautiful as at that moment. She stood erect and defiant. Her tears had vanished, and a great contempt shone in her eyes. Hilda's last words caused a thrill to pass through him. The circumstances attending her illness had made him bitterly regret the conditions to which he had been obliged to agree at his marriage, and which he had then so lightly pledged himself to observe. The thought that Abbotsbury and his family title and estates must in all probability pass into Catholic hands in the future had

haunted him of late with unpleasant insistency, for his resentment at the conduct of Lady Merton and the priests had been very deep, and it was only for Hilda's sake that he had kept silence. The birth of the still-born son had brought home to him the gravity of the promise which he had made, and he had often wondered how it was that he could no longer feel the same indifference to the idea of his successor belonging to an alien faith. The voice which he had heard in the old chancel at Abbotsbury had spoken the same words to him many times since. By what right had he pledged his successors to membership of a Church to protect their country from which the dead of the race he represented had suffered and fought? The promise, once given, however, must be maintained, and Walter Redman was too proud a man, and too loyal a gentleman, to think of not maintaining it. Hilda had married him upon the condition that the children born to them should be brought up Catholics, and Catholics they must be, unless their mother changed her faith.

'I will not have my child—your child—brought up a Catholic.'

The words rang in Lord Redman's ears as he looked at his wife in silence. He had suspected her state since they had been in Rome, but she had said no word of it to him.

Mr. Russell approached Hilda with outstretched hand.

'Lady Redman,' he said in a low voice, 'I have done you a great wrong. Can you forgive me? The trial has been a very hard one, for though Mary and I must live together as man and wife, things can never be the same as in the past. A broken confidence will

always rise up between us. Thank God we have no children! At least I shall not have to witness a struggle for my children's souls.'

Hilda took his hand with a faint smile.

'I have nothing to forgive,' she replied. 'But, oh, I do grieve for you, Mr. Russell! I cannot forgive Mary. What she has done is no religious act, but one of utter selfishness.'

'You must forgive Mary also,' said the Rector gently. 'We must remember that she believes her soul to be at stake.'

'Her soul!' exclaimed Hilda. 'There is nothing that people are so cruelly selfish about as their souls. But, Mr. Russell, what can we do? You say Mary is in a retreat conducted by Father Remington?'

'Yes. Do you know him?'

'No; I have met him. He is a famous preacher, and much sought after by the English converts here in Rome.'

'I must see my wife, Lady Redman,' said Mr. Russell. 'I wish to leave her full liberty in her new religion, and to do all I can that it should separate us as little as possible. Of course, in my position as a clergyman, it is most embarrassing. Mary's action is not only a moral blow to me, but it is an insult to my ministry. I felt that I must at once resign my charge at Abbotsbury, and——'

The door of the drawing-room opened, and one of the Italian servants asked if their Excellencies received.

'Who is it, Andrea?' asked Walter.

'Miladi Merton, Eccellenza.'

Walter and Hilda looked at each other in dismay, and then at Mr. Russell.

'No,' said Walter hurriedly to the footman; 'say that——'

'I was sure that you would be at home on such a bad afternoon. How are you, dear Hilda?'

Lady Merton had followed on the servant's heels, and was already inside the room. She gave a slight start of surprise on seeing Mr. Russell, but, recovering herself, she made him a dignified bow and sat down in the arm-chair by the side of which her grand-daughter was standing.

CHAPTER XXII

WALTER was the first to break the constrained silence which followed Lady Merton's entrance. His manner was dryness itself as he turned to her.

'Your visit is opportune, Lady Merton,' he said; 'it will save Mr. Russell the trouble of calling upon you.'

The words were studiedly cold, and not altogether polite, but Walter had difficulty enough in restraining the indignation which was boiling within him.

Lady Merton gave a deprecatory little smile.

'I was not aware that Mr. Russell was in Rome,' she remarked.

'And I,' said Hilda, 'was not aware that Mrs. Russell was here. Perhaps,' she added, 'you will explain to Mr. Russell that I am in no way responsible for the deception which has been practised upon him. He came here this afternoon under the impression that I had brought about his wife's conversion, if it can be called conversion.'

Lady Merton's eyes drooped.

'Ah, my dear Hilda,' she said, 'to some of us it is given to sow the good seed unconsciously. I can quite enter into Mr. Russell's feelings. But we will trust that Almighty God, in His own good time, will open his eyes to the truth, and that he will profit by his dear wife's example. In the meantime, she is willing

and thankful to endure persecution for the Church's sake.'

'No doubt,' exclaimed Mr. Russell; 'but at whose hands does she expect persecution, Lady Merton? Not at her husband's, surely!'

'You have refused to receive your wife back into your house because she has become a Catholic, Mr. Russell,' rejoined Lady Merton. 'Is that not an act of persecution?'

The Rector looked at her in bewilderment.

'I have refused to receive her back!' he repeated. 'That is an absurd statement to make. May I ask, Lady Merton, who has told you such an untruth?'

'Your wife herself. She showed me your letter to her. It was a cruel letter, Mr. Russell, but, alas! we converts are accustomed to encounter cruelty from those who profess to care for us.'

Mr. Russell paced backwards and forwards up and down the drawing-room.

'If she has so misunderstood me,' he exclaimed, 'it is time that I came to fetch her back. I only asked for time—a few days, perhaps—to recover from the shock I had received. Can you not understand, Lady Merton? She is my wife! I have nobody but her in this world, and now your Church has divided us—in this world and the next. Oh! it is not a bodily separation—that I know; but you have separated our souls. You have destroyed confidence and trust. Can love exist without them? Can there be a greater, a more unending cruelty?'

'Not unending,' said Hilda softly; 'there will be no Churches in the next world.'

Lady Merton turned to her indignantly.

'Hilda!' she exclaimed; 'are you losing your faith? Surely you must rejoice over Mrs. Russell's conversion! It was through you that she first became acquainted with Catholic doctrine.'

'Please do not try to fix the responsibility of Mrs. Russell's conduct upon me,' replied Hilda coldly. 'I entirely disapprove of a wife leaving her husband in ignorance of such a matter as her change of faith. If Mary had been honest, she would have made no mystery about it. Those who allowed her to act in such a manner have much to answer for.'

Lady Merton shook her head sadly.

'Ah, my dear child, this comes of living with Protestants! You have forgotten that virtue of obedience which is the mark of a good Catholic. If Mrs. Russell kept silence as to her intentions, it was because she was directed to do so by her spiritual advisers. We are not to be judges in such matters; it is our duty to obey. As I say, I feel for Mr. Russell. No doubt, to a Protestant like himself it appears an unnecessary hardship to be excluded from his wife's confidence in spiritual matters; but he must learn that human affections cannot be allowed to impede the work of the Church. In this instance, what appears to Mr. Russell to be a cruelty is in reality a kindness. The knowledge of his wife's impending conversion could only have led to painful discussions between him and her. Father Galsworthy very rightly wished to spare both his penitent and her husband any superfluous trials or difficulties. Mr. Russell must submit himself to the will of God, and pray that to him also may be vouchsafed the grace which has been bestowed upon his wife.'

'It appears to me,' said Lord Redman dryly, 'that God has very little to do with the business.'

Lady Merton darted a look of angry contempt at him.

'As you do not believe in Him, my dear Walter,' she replied, 'you are hardly competent to judge.'

'I understand that my wife is at present in retreat, Lady Merton,' said Mr. Russell.

He spoke very calmly, and with a quiet dignity of manner.

'Yes,' replied Lady Merton. 'Father Remington is conducting a retreat at this moment. A most holy man!' she added. 'I am sure that Mrs. Russell will emerge from it having gained fresh strength and courage to encounter the trials and difficulties which she may be called upon to bear for her religion's sake.'

Mr. Russell looked at her quietly.

'Those trials and difficulties will not come from me,' he said. 'I, like Father Remington, am a priest of Christ's Church, Lady Merton. If my wife has forgotten this, I do not forget it. Perhaps you will tell her so. Tell her also that I am in Rome, waiting for her to return to me.'

Lady Merton seemed as though she were about to reply, but she contented herself with bowing stiffly.

'No doubt you would like to see Mrs. Russell?' she said, turning to Hilda. 'Under the circumstances, a visit would probably be permitted.'

'No,' replied Hilda; 'I have no wish to see Mrs. Russell until she has returned to her proper place by her husband's side. Please tell her so.'

Lady Merton looked from one to the other of them with aggrieved astonishment.

'It is so sad,' she murmured, 'to find such intoler-

ance—so very sad! But we Catholics are proud to be persecuted for our Lord's sake. As for you, Hilda,' she continued, 'I am distressed beyond words at your attitude. Instead of standing by your friend Mrs. Russell, you hold aloof from her. You, a Catholic, deny your help and sympathy to one who has sacrificed much for the Church's sake.'

'She has indeed sacrificed much,' exclaimed Hilda, with scarcely repressed indignation. 'She has sacrificed truth and honour, and a husband's happiness, at the bidding of those who move heaven and earth to make one proselyte, even if that proselyte be a weak woman. Well, if this is religion, I have no sympathy with it. I——'

Mr. Russell interposed.

'Lady Redman,' he said gently, 'do not allow your compassion for me to lessen your faith. We must make allowances for the opinions of others, however much we may disagree with them. After all, we are all of us Christians. I have no right to speak to you, for I am not of your Church; but, thank God! the Church of England teaches tolerance, and shall I, her minister, not practise it? Lady Merton, I hope, will believe that I shall not persecute my wife for Christ's sake, however much I may grieve over what I hold to be a terrible error on her part. But you, Lady Redman, I would not have you shaken in your faith by things in which, as your husband said a few minutes ago, God has no part.'

Lady Merton rose from her seat.

'I shall leave you to benefit by your Protestant surroundings, Hilda,' she said scornfully. 'I cannot remain in your house to hear our holy religion insulted.

Ours, did I say? I should rather have said mine; for, whatever you may be, Hilda, you are no longer a Catholic. Poor, misguided child! has not the warning of God's anger which you have so recently received been sufficient for you?'

'One moment, Lady Merton; we shall not detain you long.'

Walter Redman suddenly broke the silence which he had maintained.

'You are very ready to take God into partnership,' he said. 'Let me assure you that the warning to which you allude has been more than enough for my wife—and for myself. Your zeal for proselytism nearly cost Hilda her life. It did cost the life of her child. You need not be at all uneasy, for we shall scarcely fail to profit by your warning—indeed, I believe that Hilda has profited by it already.'

'I do not know what you mean, Walter,' said Lady Merton loftily. 'But I do know that since you have married my grand-daughter you have systematically endeavoured to undermine and destroy her faith. In England you have surrounded her with agnostics like Mr. Shirley, and here in Rome you have thrown her with people whose acquaintance good Catholics seek to avoid. How far such conduct on your part is honourable, and consistent with the promises you made at your marriage, I leave to your conscience to decide.'

'It is not true!' exclaimed Hilda indignantly. 'You have no right to say such things. Walter has been loyal, and more than loyal, to his word. It is you, and those about you, who have done your best to destroy my faith. My husband has never told you this, but

now I will tell you, and perhaps you will understand It was I who asked him to protect me from you, and from those whom you had set to try to terrorize me into doing what you wished. Thank God, my faith in His goodness and my love for my husband have been strong enough to vanquish the superstitious fears upon which you tried to work. Walter is right: you nearly killed me, among you, and you did kill my child —his child. You would have had me break my promise to him without scruple—the promise you urged me to give, making me believe that my future husband was certain to become a Catholic, and that it was all a mere matter of form to facilitate our marriage. You meant me to make him become a Catholic, because his conversion would add to the Church's influence, and you would not have cared had Walter been another Wearmouth; you would have encouraged me to marry him all the same.'

'Hilda!' exclaimed her husband. 'What are you saying?'

'Walter, I will speak!' she continued impetuously. 'I am weary and sick of the falseness, the pretence of religion, where there is nothing but ambition and worldliness, the mad desire to extend the influence of the Church at all costs, the use of Almighty God to frighten the weak, as nurses conjure up a bogey with which to frighten naughty children. And now you have made another convert; and in what way? By encouraging a wife to deceive her husband, by ruining a home, by breaking the heart of a good man.'

Hilda stopped. She was breathing rapidly and her eyes flashed indignantly upon Lady Merton. The latter looked at her grand-daughter with an expression of

stunned amazement on her face, which presently disappeared before her rising anger.

'I hope you are satisfied with the result of your efforts to destroy your wife's faith,' she said to Walter bitterly. 'This is the natural consequence of associating with so-called Liberal Catholics like the Brancaleone, and unworthy priests like Monsignor Martini. I will not dwell upon the ingratitude which both of you are showing towards me. Every word which you have uttered, Hilda, tells me but too plainly that what we have all dreaded for you has come to pass. You are no longer a Catholic. You have allowed an earthly affection to blind you to your duty towards the Church. You have lost your faith.'

There was a moment's pause as Lady Merton ceased speaking. Hilda's face quivered with an emotion which she was determined to control. Almost unconsciously she crossed the room to her husband and stood by his side.

'I think,' she replied gently, 'that I have found it.'

CHAPTER XXIII

HILDA had kept the fact that she expected again to become a mother very carefully to herself. Had it not been for the agitation which the discovery of Mary Russell's clandestine conversion had caused her, she would probably have allowed a few more weeks to pass before acquainting Walter with what had now passed from a hope into a certainty.

Since she had been in Rome many influences had been at work in her mind. She had come to the fountain-head of her religion believing that she should be strengthened in her faith, and anxious to assure herself that here at least she should recover the respect for the Church which the events of the last few months had so severely tried.

But from the day on which she first entered St. Peter's her disappointment had become ever greater, her dissatisfaction more complete.

This was not the Rome she had so often imagined in the days of her girlhood at Cawarden, the Holy City where the Vicar of Christ watched over the needs of the Church, and where men should feel themselves as standing at the threshold of heaven.

Being, as Mr. Shirley had said of her, a woman who thought, Lady Redman had quickly realized that whatever Roman Catholicism might be in England, at Rome

it was far less of a religious than a political power, and it had not taken her long to discover that the 'exaltation of our Holy Mother the Church' signified in reality the furtherance of the social and political aims of the Vatican. The circumstances under which she had made her first acquaintance with Rome had contributed in no slight degree towards enabling Hilda to penetrate the artificial surface which masks the most complicated, and possibly the most powerful, political institution of modern times. The fact of her being by birth a member of an old Catholic family in England, and granddaughter to Lady Merton, whose name was as a household word among the Black society of the capital, had given her the entrance not only into the houses of the English-speaking convert society, of which her grandmother was an acknowledged leader, but also into that more exclusive world of the genuine Romans belonging to the clerical party who affected to ignore the existence of the Quirinal and the Government, and to regard the Vatican as the Court and the centre of authority. On the other hand, her marriage with the Protestant head of a well-known English house had opened to her other doors than those of the narrow and bigoted society in whose midst she would certainly have found herself, and into which the English Roman Catholic, on first coming to Rome, usually drifts. She had not been slow to seize the opportunity of escaping from Lady Merton's *entourage*, and Walter's absolute refusal, after his first experiences, to enter it, had greatly facilitated her emancipation from the social and moral nets which are carefully woven to prevent the novice at Rome from falling under Liberal influences.

Of all the acquaintances she had made at Rome,

Hilda undoubtedly preferred the Princess Brancaleone and Monsignor Martini. These, indeed, had become more than acquaintances, and Hilda regarded them both as friends to whom she could talk unrestrainedly. Princess Brancaleone, with her ready sympathies, had quickly discovered that Lady Redman was both puzzled and disappointed by what she saw around her. As an Englishwoman, married to one of the most important of the Roman princes, she had frequently to receive compatriots who were recommended to her good offices by friends in England. As a rule, however, she found that they preferred being left to their hotel life and to their English tea-parties, their one idea being to see as little of Italian life as they could, in order, possibly, to feel more free to abuse the Italians. She had made up her mind the first night on which the Redmans dined at the Palazzo Montelupi that they were not people to ask to dinner once and then relegate to the limbo of the English colony. Princess Brancaleone was nothing if not a woman of the world, and it had not escaped her that Lady Redman, instead of sitting alone in a corner with an expression of superiority and disapproval, as did most of her English guests, was always surrounded by a group of people who were evidently pleased to meet her. Lord Redman, too, instead of standing awkwardly near a door, speaking to nobody and looking unutterably bored, was able to talk in other tongues besides his own, and to talk well. The consequences had been that the Princess and her husband had compared notes, and the Redmans from that day became frequent guests at the Palazzo Montelupi, and at the dinners which they were

perpetually giving during the Roman season. It was here that Hilda and Walter met all the most interesting people of the capital. The Princess had no sooner discovered that they were anxious to see the true life of Rome, and that the foreign colony bored them, than she exerted herself to make them acquainted with those men and women who were forming the history of their day in Italy and elsewhere.

Princess Brancaleone's salon was not only cosmopolitan, but it was also one in which talent was welcomed as an honoured guest, and birth had sometimes to be content with the second place.

The letters which she had received from her old friend Mr. Shirley concerning Lord and Lady Redman had increased the interest which she already felt in them. He had given her more than one hint as to how matters stood between Walter and his wife, and the Princess, though her acquaintance with Lady Merton was of the slightest nature, was well aware of the latter's mania for proselytism, and both distrusted and disliked the set by which she was surrounded in Rome.

She had not been surprised, therefore, when Hilda had talked of her disappointment at finding political animosities where she had expected to find religion; malice and evil-speaking where Christian charity ought to have reigned. Possessing, as she did, a clue to Hilda's character, and a tolerably correct idea of the difficulties with which she had to contend, Princess Brancaleone was able to guess at the spirit which prompted many of her remarks.

She had hardly known how to reply when Hilda had sometimes asked what she should have done had

Prince Brancaleone been a Protestant, and whether she would have tried to convert him. She herself had come to Rome a sincere though liberal-minded Catholic, but a few years passed under the shadow of the Vatican had caused her to relinquish all attempts to believe in its spirituality. Both her husband and she had suffered too deeply from the vindictive spite of the clerical party, from whose ranks Prince Brancaleone, for patriotic motives and from a sense of disgust at the degrading effects of the policy of the Church upon the people, had separated himself.

The Princess had tried to parry Hilda's questions by pointing out that, at Rome, it was the custom for a husband and wife to be at least nominally of the same faith, and that had she not already been a Catholic when she married the Prince, she would have been obliged to become one.

'It would have been much simpler,' Hilda had observed, 'if I had become a Protestant when I married Walter. A wife ought certainly to belong to the same religion as her husband.'

Hilda had been deeply shocked and disgusted at the deception and dishonesty which had attended Mary Russell's conversion. She had adhered to her determination not to see Mrs. Russell until the latter had returned to her husband. When she did see her, after she emerged from her 'retreat,' she soon discovered that Mary was as violently Catholic as she had once been anti-Catholic. She had adopted the aggressive attitude which she had learned from those who had brought about her change of faith. Mrs. St. Leger had, so to speak, appropriated the new convert for her own, and already she and Madame de Hohenthal had

whispered tales of Mr. Russell's persecution of his wife and accounts of the trials which she was undergoing for the Church's sake into the ears of ready sympathizers.

From the bottom of her heart Hilda pitied the Rector, and admired him for his generous and dignified attitude under circumstances so trying and painful. Of his own feelings, since the day when he had come to Rome and told them of the blow which had fallen upon him, he had never spoken either to Hilda or Lord Redman, but both could read in his face the sorrow and mortification through which he was passing. Strangely enough, it was from Monsignor Martini that Mr. Russell appeared to derive the most consolation and support. The two had met in the Via Gaeta on several occasions, and Walter Redman had told the Monsignore the story of the Rector's troubles. Lord Redman was greatly impressed by the way in which the latter took his trials, and said so to the priest.

'Ah!' Monsignor Martini had replied, 'that man is not a Protestant or a Catholic; he is simply a good Christian. He is suffering horribly, wounded alike in his love for his wife and in his religious convictions. I believe that he feels the slight cast upon his ministry more than he does the betrayal of the trust which should exist between husband and wife.'

The date fixed for the Redmans' departure from Rome was fast approaching. They had abandoned their original idea of going to Naples. There had been so much to occupy their days in Rome that Hilda had felt unwilling to leave it, and she and Walter were both desirous of seeing the great ceremony of the Canonization of Saints which was to

take place in St. Peter's, and form the chief among the ecclesiastical spectacles of the Anno Santo.

Hilda had duly received the three tickets to be present at the ceremonial which had been promised to her, and she and her husband had arranged to call for Monsignor Martini on their way to the basilica.

By the time they arrived at St. Peter's, an enormous crowd had assembled, and those who possessed tickets were endeavouring to make their way through it, in order to reach the doors of the church. Companies of the soldiers of United Italy were drawn up in the piazza and at the entrance to the basilica, their patience and courtesy contrasting favourably with the ill-manners and selfishness displayed by the Seminarists and pilgrims who at intervals made futile attempts to break through the military cordon, hustling and ill-treating women and children in their mad anxiety to enter the building, and insulting the Italian soldiers when the latter were ordered by their officers to close up and make them await their turn to pass on.

At length the carriage which conveyed Lord and Lady Redman and Monsignor Martini reached the sacristy, for which ingress their tickets were available, and a few minutes afterwards they found themselves inside the great church. The building was completely transformed. The marble columns and pillars were draped with red damask. The windows were covered, and from the roof hung innumerable candelabra, blazing with wax candles, while over the apse was the *gloria* of the newly-made saints—a painting representing their miracles—surrounded by rays of electric light from countless lamps. In front, opposite the High Altar, rose the Papal throne, and to right and left of it

were the seats for the Sacred College of Cardinals, the Archbishops, Patriarchs, and high ecclesiastical dignitaries of the Papal Court. Behind these, again, were the tribunes reserved for the foreign Sovereigns and royalties, the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, the Roman patriciate and high officials of the Vatican, and immediately to the right of the throne were the posts of the Grand Master and Knights of the Sovereign Order of Malta. Behind the Confessional of St. Peter, in the body of the church, rose the vast tribunes devoted to the pilgrims, the secular and regular clergy of Rome, the Seminarists, and the public; and in the centre a broad space, patrolled by chamberlains and soldiers of the Swiss and Palatine Guards, was kept clear for the passing of the Papal procession.

The organization for the handling of the many thousands of people assembled in St. Peter's was admirable, and, once inside the church, the Redmans and Monsignor Martini were able to find their seats without delay. There was yet more than an hour to elapse before the time fixed for the commencement of the ceremony, and Monsignor Martini had warned Hilda that Leo XIII. was invariably unpunctual.

'In that,' he observed, with a twinkle in his eyes, 'the Pope is a true Italian.'

Hilda occupied herself with looking at the brilliant spectacle which the great basilica presented. The pompous vulgarity of the interior of the church had given place to an effect even less suitable to a sacred edifice. The hangings and the draperies, the glass chandeliers, and the devices of electric light, gave her the impression of being in some colossal music-

hall, or in an opera house prepared, with doubtful taste, for a gala representation. From the tribune in which their seats were situated the statue of St. Peter was plainly visible. A mitre had been placed on the bronze head of the figure, and a rich, bejewelled cope hung stiffly from its shoulders, an offence to the art of the sculptor.

Monsignor Martini watched Hilda's countenance.

'You have come to witness a pagan ceremony in Christian dress,' he said in a low voice, as he followed her gaze and saw that it was fixed upon the grotesque figure supposed to represent the chief of the Apostles. 'I have always thought,' he added, 'that statue, when robed in the pontifical vestments, to be typical of our Roman faith and system, the pagan form clothed with the emblems of Christian sacerdotalism.'

As the hour at which the Pope was expected to make his entry into the basilica approached, the scene increased in brilliancy and animation. The clash of steel resounded as the Papal Guards presented arms to the ambassadors and ministers accredited to the Holy See, who arrived in quick succession, followed by their staffs, their uniforms blazing with stars and orders. Then a gleam of scarlet and white flashed through the ranks of black-veiled women and men clad in their evening dress, as the Grand Master of Malta, received with sovereign honours, and his attendant knights, were escorted to the places reserved for the Order. Suddenly a quiver of excitement ran through the church, and the great mass of human beings seemed to sway and heave like the swell of the sea. Cries of 'Viva il Papa-Re!' were raised by fanatical Seminarists and Ultramontanes, to be hushed

down by those standing around them, for it had been notified that the Pope did not on this occasion wish to be greeted by the cheers and plaudits which, since the fall of the temporal power of the Papacy, usually accompany his appearance in St. Peter's. Then the tempestuous movement of the crowd subsided, and the murmurs died away into an oppressive silence. Every head was turned towards the great doors of the portico, by which the Papal procession was to enter.

Presently the strains of distant chanting fell upon the ears of the listening multitude, faintly audible and confused at first, but gradually growing louder and more distinct. A glimmer of candles slowly advancing marked the approach of the procession preceding that of the Papal Court which escorted the Pontiff himself. Two by two the Regular Clergy entered the basilica—first those of the Mendicant Orders, the Augustinians, Capuchins, Franciscans, Carmelites, Dominicans, and many more; and following these the Monastic Orders—the Olivetans, Benedictines, Cistercians; the Canons of St. John Lateran, the Cathedral Church of Rome, bringing up the rear.

Preceded by a cross-bearer and two acolytes, there followed in endless array the parish priests and Vicars of Rome; behind these came the Canons and dignitaries of the collegiate churches and basilicas, with the secular clergy attached to them; and at their head the Cardinal-Vicar of the Eternal City and officials of the Curia. Slowly the long procession advanced up the centre of the basilica, each member of it carrying a lighted candle in his hand. Religious confraternities, with their banners, and personages belonging to the families and Religious Orders of those about to be

canonized, formed the rearguard of this army of clerics.

A pause, and the hymn *Ave Maris Stella* echoed through the church, sung by the Papal choir, who entered heralding the coming of the Pope. Following them were two of the Swiss Guard in full uniform, and a pontifical Master of the Ceremonies. Then, two and two walked the Papal Chamberlains, the Pope's confessor and domestic preacher, and his chaplains bearing the triple crowns and jewelled mitres of the Head of Christendom, while immediately after these came, in right of his office, the jeweller to the Papal Court.

Next in order advanced the high ecclesiastics of the United Greek Rite, a deacon bearing aloft the Papal Cross, surrounded by seven dignitaries acting as acolytes and carrying seven candelabra with burning and richly-ornamented candles. Before the penitentiaries of the Vatican basilica walked two priests, holding long rods adorned with flowers, emblematic of the power of the former to chastise consciences and to temper chastisement with mercy.

'I notice,' said Walter Redman, as the group passed them and Monsignor Martini explained the meaning of the rods, 'that the flowers are sham.'

Monsignor Martini gave him a quick glance of amusement, but he did not reply.

And now the cortège assumed a character of majestic brilliancy. In bewildering succession came the Abbots-General, the Bishops, Archbishops, Primates and Patriarchs, and following them the three grades of the Sacred College of Cardinals.

The strains of the *Ave Maris Stella* sound ever louder

and clearer, and from the trumpets posted above the entrance ring out the notes of the Papal March.

The Prince-Assistant to the throne, chief of the ancient House of Colonna, and the Vice-Chamberlain of the Holy Church, advance alone, followed by the Apostolic notaries, and then two Cardinal-Deacons and the Cardinal-Priest whose office it is to assist the Pope at the Mass celebrated immediately after the formal declaration of canonization. After these walk the Masters of Ceremonies.

And then from beneath the portico slowly emerges a group more brilliant than all the rest, and raised high above it a figure of dazzling whiteness. The frail, bent body sits on the Sedia Gestatoria bowed down beneath the weight of the rich vestments, and the triple tiara, blazing with jewels, crowns the snow-white head. It is an imposing figure, and a very pathetic one.

Slowly and evenly the raised throne with its white occupant seems to glide through the kneeling throng, and the Pope passes, holding in his left hand a lighted candle, while his right arm is upraised in blessing, and the long, trembling fingers make the sign of the cross over the prostrate people. Every now and then Leo. XIII. leans back as though exhausted, and those who do not know the Pope wonder if he is about to succumb under the physical and mental strain. But the keen eyes never lose their intensity, and seem to pierce the furthest recesses of the vast church. The smile, which is no smile, is always there, and gives an impression of benevolence belied by the harsh lines of the mouth, and the stern, imperious glance which gleams from under the white brow.

Around the Pope walk with drawn swords the officers

of the Noble Guard, while beside the Sedia Gestatoria are borne the great ostrich-feather fans, and behind it are the Papal physician and other officers of the Apostolic household. Behind these, again, walk a body of choral chaplains chanting the 'Star of the Sea,' and the magnificent procession is closed by the Generals of the Religious Orders.

Contrary to the usual practice when the Pope descends in St. Peter's, a halt is not made at the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament for the Pontiff to pray before the Host. The Vicegerent of God, with the keys of heaven in his hand, passes triumphantly on his way to his throne, and the nations gathered together in St. Peter's bow down in reverence before the human being who is about to open the gates of heaven and to increase the company of the Saints.

With stately pomp and circumstance, the Papal cortège moves up the church, and in front of the altar of the Confessional the Sedia Gestatoria is gently lowered to the ground. The Pope descends from it, and with rapid, uneven strides advances to a golden faldstool, at which he kneels for a few moments in prayer; then rising, he ascends the steps of the throne and seats himself upon it.

The Cardinals advance one by one and kiss his hand; the Patriarchs, Primates, Archbishops and Bishops pay their homage by kissing the cross on the stole, the ends of which rest on the Pontiff's knees; the Abbots-*nullius* and the Abbots-General kiss his foot. Then the dignitaries of the church resume their places, and the formalities of the making of Saints commence.

The Cardinal-Procurator of the canonization advances towards the throne, supported by a Master of Cere-

monies, and a consistorial advocate. Kneeling before the Pope, he petitions the latter *instanter* that the candidates for canonization may be inscribed by His Holiness among Christ's Saints, and that they may be venerated as Saints by all the faithful.

The Secretary of Briefs, standing on the steps of the throne, replies for the Pope in Latin. He informs the Cardinal-Procurator that the virtues and merits of the proposed candidates are known to the Holy Father, as also are the miracles performed by them. Before, however, His Holiness can pronounce upon a matter of such gravity, he exhorts all present to implore that the Divine aid may be vouchsafed to him through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, and the Celestial Court. The Cardinal-Procurator returns to his seat. The Pope kneels once more at the faldstool before the altar while the Litany of the Saints is chanted.

At the close of the Litany, His Holiness returns to the throne, and the Cardinal-Procurator advances with the same ceremony, and repeats his petition, substituting for the word *instanter* the comparative term *instantius*.

The Secretary of Briefs replies that His Holiness, realizing the importance and greatness of the act which he is about to perform, implores the help of the Holy Ghost, the source of illumination and of wisdom.

The Pope, assuming the mitre, kneels before the altar, while the first Assisting Cardinal-Deacon says in a loud voice: 'Orate.' Removing the mitre, the Pope prays while the *Miserere* is being sung, only rising from his knees when the second Cardinal-Deacon exclaims: 'Levate.' All present rise with the Pope. Two

Bishops approach him with book and candles, and he intones the *Veni Creator Spiritus*. At the close of the hymn the Pope resumes his seat on the throne, and the solemn moment of ratification of the canonization approaches.

The Cardinal-Procurator kneels before the Vicar of Christ a third time, and the consistorial advocate a third time repeats the petition, adding to the terms *instanter, instantius*, the superlative *instantissime*.

The Secretary of Briefs replies that His Holiness, persuaded that the canonization prayed for is pleasing to God, deigns to pronounce definitely upon the matter. At these words all rise to their feet. The mitred Pontiff speaks *ex cathedrâ*, and, as Head of the Universal Church, delivers his infallible judgment.

The voice of the old man of ninety years rings out clear and strong, and a great hush falls upon the vast crowd. It is the Vice-God who is speaking now, he who has power to loose and to bind, to save and to destroy, whose authority reaches beyond the grave, even through the cycles of eternity.

The Pope emphasizes the Latin words with a peculiar convulsive movement of his frail body. The white arms are uplifted, and the eyes of 60,000 people are riveted upon the figure of this old man who is speaking, not with the tongue of Count Gioacchino Pecci, whom the world calls Leo XIII., but with that of the Holy Ghost:

'Ad honorem Sanctæ et Individuæ Trinitatis, ad exaltationem Fidei Catholicæ, et Christianæ Religionis augmentum, auctoritate Domini Nostri Jesu Christi, Beatorum Apostolorum Petri et Pauli ac Nostra; matura deliberatione præhabita et Divina Ope sæpius implorata, ac de Venerabilium Fratrum Nostrorum Sanctæ Romanæ Ecclesiæ Cardinalium, Patriarcharum, Archiepiscoporum et Epis

coporum in Urbe existentium consilio, Beatos Ritam a Cassia, et Iohannem Baptistam de la Salle Confessores, Sanctos esse decernimus et definimus ac Sanctorum Catologo adscribimus. . . . . In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.'*

The infallible decree has gone forth, and the new Saints are elevated to the honours of the altar. Leo XIII. sinks back on his throne as if exhausted, but the keen eyes are gleaming with a scarcely concealed satisfaction. The Cardinal-Procurator and consistorial advocate kneel again at his feet. The latter thanks the Pope in the Cardinal's name, and begs of him yet one more favour, namely the direction of Letters Apostolic confirming the dignity of the newly-canonized. The Holy Father signifies his consent, and the Cardinal-Procurator ascends the steps of the throne, and, with a profound genuflection kisses the hands and the knees of the Supreme Pontiff.

Then the Pope, rising, intones the first strophe of the *Te Deum.* A flourish of trumpets sounds from the summit of the dome, followed by the booming of the great bells of the basilica, while all the bells of Rome peal and clash in response to the signal from St. Peter's, announcing, to the city that the gates of

* 'In honour of the Holy and Indivisible Trinity, for the exaltation of the Catholic Faith, and for the increase of the Christian Religion, by the authority of Our Lord Jesus Christ, of the blessed Apostles, Peter and Paul, and by Our own Authority; after mature deliberation, and after having implored the Divine Assistance, having heard the judgment of Our Venerable brothers, the Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, the Patriarchs, Archbishops and Bishops present in the City, we decree and name Saints, and inscribe in the Calendar of the Saints, the blessed Confessor Rita da Cascia and Jean Baptiste de la Salle . . . . In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.'

heaven have opened once more at the bidding of the Pontifex Maximus.

Hilda and her husband followed attentively each successive portion of the ceremony, while Monsignor Martini explained to them its significance. Their places were near enough to the Papal throne to enable them to observe the features and bearing of its occupant.

'Does he believe in his own power?' whispered Walter, as, after pronouncing the Apostolic Benediction, the Pope retired for a few minutes to rest and take his usual cup of soup before the Mass succeeding the canonization should commence.

'Does he not!' answered Monsignor Martini. 'Could you look at the expression of his face when he said the words "and by Our own authority," and doubt it? Leo XIII. is a profound believer in his own infallibility—more so, perhaps, than Pius IX. was. When, after the promulgation of the dogma of Infallibility, a prelate with whom I was acquainted, and who made no secret of his disbelief in it, ventured to ask Pio Nono whether he believed himself to be infallible, the answer he received was this: "I, Mastai Ferretti, believe that the Pope is infallible." The note of sarcasm is lost in the English, nor can the look of humour which accompanied the remark be reproduced. Are you impressed by this ceremony, Lady Redman?' he added, turning to Hilda.

'I am deeply interested, but not impressed. I feel as if I were at the theatre, and that nothing around me is real,' she replied. 'No doubt these terrible decorations give one that idea,' she continued; 'and then one doubts whether it can be true that any human being

possesses so much power over the future life as is implied by what we have just seen. Do you believe it, Monsignore?' she asked suddenly in a low voice.

Monsignor Martini hesitated and looked around him almost nervously.

'Rome has always professed to exercise auhoritty in the next world,' he replied, with a smile. 'Cæsar had believers in his divinity, as Leo has in his supernatural powers.'

At this moment the Pope reappeared.

'Some of the most curious ceremonies have yet to come,' continued Monsignor Martini.

On a credence-table at the left-hand side of the altar were placed the effigies of the new Saints, with the Papal arms beneath. Enormous wax candles lay on the table, two of which weighed no less than sixty pounds, while the remainder weighed twelve pounds. Beside these were two large loaves of bread, one gilded, the other silvered, on magnificent golden dishes, a gold and a silver barrel, the one containing wine and the other water, and three gilded bird-cages, in which were respectively turtle-doves, pigeons, and small birds of various species.

During the offertory of the Mass, the Cardinals and others selected for the office advanced to the table, their right hands covered with a small white napkin. Then, preceded by two Pontifical Ushers and a Master of Ceremonies, and escorted by his Gentlemen-in-Waiting, bearing the two huge candles, a Cardinal-Bishop advanced to the foot of the throne. He was followed by two monks belonging to the Religious Orders of the canonized, one of whom bore a smaller candle, while the other carried the cage containing the

pigeons. A similar procession, headed by a Cardinal-priest, and a third, escorting a Cardinal-Deacon followed, the former bearing the turtle-doves, and the latter the barrels containing the water and the wine. Finally, the Cardinal-Procurator advanced with the offering of smaller wax-candles and the cage of little singing-birds.

Each of the gifts was presented in its order to the Holy Father, the donors kissing his hand and knees.

'The wax candles,' explained Monsignor Martini, 'signify the flesh of Christ. As wax, the work of bees, is created from the purest substance of flowers and is incorruptible, so the flesh of Christ, derived from His Immaculate Mother, is incorruptible. The flame of the candle symbolizes His Divinity, and also the ardour for Him which should burn within us. The oblation of the bread indicates that the Saints care for no other food save that of the Body of Christ in the Sacrament. It is a symbol, also, of their charity. The wine signifies the abundance of grace poured forth upon them, and is also an allusion to the mystic vineyard of the Lord; the water represents the sorrows and tribulations of life, and also purity, wisdom, grace and eternal salvation. The turtle-doves are emblematic of fidelity, and, since they are garrulous birds, of the gift of preaching.'

Monsignor Martini's eyes twinkled as he proffered the last explanation, and Walter Redman was obliged to restrain his laughter.

'They also signify,' he continued, 'purity, grief, and love of solitude. The pigeons are symbolic of charity, and also, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, of the

seven gifts of the Holy Ghost. The little birds represent the winged flight of the Saints towards heaven, the perpetual song in praise of the Most High. There are countless other significations which theologians have pretended to discover in these mystic offerings,' he concluded, 'but I shall not try your patience by enumerating them.'

The wearisome formalities of the Pontifical Mass at last came to an end. The dressing and undressing of the officiating ecclesiastics, and the perpetual genuflections, were over, and the Papal procession re-formed itself. The Pope reseated himself on the Sedia Gestatoria, and with the same pomp and magnificence as had characterized its entrance, the Papal Court prepared to leave St. Peter's. Once again the white-robed figure, triple-crowned, raised itself upon trembling hands, and made great sweeping signs of the cross over the prostrate multitude. Then the pent-up feelings of the thousands who thronged the basilica burst forth into a storm of applause and cheering. Women and men threw themselves on their knees and bowed their faces to the earth as the Vicar of Christ passed by. The pale, transparent face was suffused by a faint glow of colour, the white hand, with the diamonds of the episcopal ring glittering in the artificial light, was raised again and again in blessing, and for the first time the penetrating expression of the eyes softened. Then, as the ostrich fans disappeared under the portico of the church, a great shout of 'Viva il Papa! Evviva il Papa-Re!' rent the air, and Leo XIII. was borne away to his self-imposed captivity within the Vatican.

CHAPTER XXIV

IT was two o'clock before Walter and Hilda found themselves back in the Via Gaeta after the long ceremony in St. Peter's. They brought Monsignor Martini back to luncheon with them, and all three were more than ready for the meal, for the canonization had lasted nearly five hours, and they had breakfasted early in order to be at the basilica in good time.

Walter had made an appointment that afternoon with Prince Brancaleone to visit a horse-breeding establishment belonging to the latter, situated a few miles out of Rome, and as soon as luncheon was over he left Monsignor Martini and Hilda together, and drove down to the Palazzo Montelupi.

Monsignor Martini was about to take his departure also, but Hilda begged him not to do so.

'I am not going out this afternoon,' she said to him; 'this morning's function was quite enough for one day. Will you not stop a little while and talk to me, Monsignore?'

'With great pleasure,' he replied; and the two went to the drawing-room together as Walter Redman left the house.

'Have you seen anything more of Mr. Russell?' asked Hilda presently.

'Yes,' answered Monsignor Martini; 'he has been

several times to see me. It appears that he and his wife are going to leave Rome in a day or two. She was in St. Peter's this morning; I saw her with Mrs. St. Leger as we went in. But you have not seen Mrs. Russell, I suppose?' he added.

'No,' said Hilda. 'To tell you the truth, I have avoided her. I feel too angry with her to go and see her. Do you think that very wrong of me, Monsignore?'

'You are one of her persecutors,' replied Monsignor Martini, with a smile.

'I?'

'So I hear. Mrs. Russell is quite a heroine in your English Catholic world in Rome. I have been asked if it was true that her husband turned her out into the street, or, rather, I was told so as a fact, and my reply was not listened to. Lady Merton is—what is your expression?—"running," is it not?—yes, running her as a persecuted convert; and she has been presented to the Pope as such. People say that her husband will give her no money, and that Lady Merton's charity keeps her from starving.'

Hilda laughed, notwithstanding her indignation.

'I wonder if the Pope was told that,' she said.

'Certainly he will have been told it,' said Monsignor Martini. 'He will have given her his benediction, the poor man!' he added, with a little outbreak of Roman sarcasm.

Hilda Redman was silent for a few moments, during which she looked at the priest as though debating in her mind whether she should speak her thoughts or not.

'Monsignore,' she said at length hesitatingly, 'I am glad we are alone together this afternoon. In a few days my husband and I will have left Rome, and I

have always had something on my mind about which I have been longing to ask for your help and advice.'

Monsignor Martini's satirical manner left him in an instant.

'I shall be very glad if I can be of any help to you, Lady Redman,' he said gently; 'but as to my advice—well, I am afraid that it is not worth very much. I am not going to ask you what it is you wish to consult me about, for, instead of your telling me, I think it would be easier if I told you. You can tell me if I am mistaken.'

Hilda nodded her head without speaking.

'We have had many conversations together,' continued Monsignor Martini, 'and though you have never said as much to me, I have gathered from them that you do not see your way clearly before you. You came to Rome hoping to see it more clearly, and you are disappointed. Is it not so?'

'Yes,' exclaimed Hilda eagerly, 'more than disappointed.'

Monsignor Martini gave a little sigh.

'Disgusted perhaps?' he replied. 'Well,' he continued, 'I have known many people in your position, but most of them have not had the courage to confess to it. But what do you fear from this feeling, Lady Redman?'

'That it has caused me to lose my faith in the Church,' replied Hilda, in a low voice. 'That is a terrible thing to say, is it not?' she added. 'You will tell me that I should not think—that I should only accept and obey; and I might do so if I had only myself to consider, but there are others—my husband, and——' She stopped confusedly.

'I quite understand,' said Monsignor Martini quietly; and then he added, 'I will ask you the question that I have more than once asked your husband when we have discussed these things together. What do you mean by "the Church"?'

'Why, our Church, the Roman Church, of course,' replied Hilda.

'And you have lost your faith in the Roman Church,' repeated Monsignor Martini. 'Why?'

Hilda looked at him with some surprise. His voice was very gentle, and she could not help thinking how differently Father Galsworthy or Father Vincent would have received such a confession. His manner had undergone no alteration. He was still the man, not the ecclesiastic.

'Why?' he asked again, and as his clear brown eyes met her own Hilda read no look of stern condemnation in them, but only sympathy, and perhaps a little sadness. Then she told him all the story of her married life; how she had been assured that Lord Redman would certainly become a Catholic if she married him; how quickly she had realized that nothing was further from his thoughts and intentions, and the pressure which had been brought to bear upon her to make her break her promise to her husband and force her to convert him to Catholicism. She told him of the mental struggle through which she had passed, and of her interviews with the Dominican at Abbotsbridge and with the Oratorian in London.

Monsignor Martini listened in silence. Once or twice he shaded his eyes with his hand and appeared to be thinking deeply.

'And then,' continued Hilda, 'I came to Rome. It

was a mistake, I think. Had I never done so, I should still have been able to believe in the Church. I told myself that what I had undergone in England I had undergone at the hands of fanatical converts, but that at Rome I should find the true Catholic Church. You ask me why I have lost my faith, Monsignore. I have lost it by coming to Rome. Luther lost it in the same way, did he not? I thought that Rome would strengthen my belief in the Church; I even dreamed that our being here together might lead my husband to become a Catholic. When I was a girl I used to picture to myself the Vatican and the Pope. Well, the Vatican is a political and a money-making machine, and the Pope—— Can a reasonable human being witness such a scene as that of this morning without a smile at the folly and at the arrogance of it? Those priests—you saw them—they were laughing, as they laugh at the credulity of the poor pilgrims and at the superstition of the peasants at the Ara Coeli or in Sant Agostino. One cannot see such things and believe——'

'In our Roman system? Perhaps not,' interposed Monsignor Martini calmly.

'And then,' continued Hilda, 'all the heartless deceit which has attended Mrs. Russell's conversion. Do you know, Monsignore, that the last time I called on my grandmother in the Via Gregoriana they were congratulating themselves on the mortification it must be to Mr. Russell as an Anglican clergyman to feel that his wife disbelieved in his Church and in the validity of his Orders. That shocked me more than I can tell you, for I know what a cruel blow it has been to Mr. Russell, and how generously he has forgiven his wife's want of

confidence in him. I am no theologian, and therefore I cannot reason on points of dogma, but I cannot believe in a system which tolerates and encourages such deception as I see around me here in Rome. Is it possible that it can be right to allow the uneducated to believe in things which those who countenance them must know in their hearts to be impostures? I know the excuse which is made for doing so—that if the people were not allowed to believe in their miraculous shrines and images they would believe in nothing at all. But would such an excuse be made if those superstitions were not productive of money, and if they did not keep the masses under the domination of the Church? It does not strike one in England that one belongs to such a system. English Catholicism seems to be so different. But since I have been in Rome I see Catholicism as it is. My reasons for doubting must appear to you very superficial, very foolish—a woman's reasons, do they not?'

Monsignor Martini looked at her attentively.

'What do you want my advice upon?' he asked.

'Can anything justify a Catholic mother in consenting to her child being brought up in another religion?' she said hurriedly.

'Have you been asked to do so, Lady Redman?'

'No; Walter—my husband—would never ask it of me, but——'

'But he would wish it, you think?'

'Yes. When he married me he did not care, or he thought that he did not.'

'And now?'

'Now he does care. I am glad that he does.'

'Why should you be glad?' asked Monsignor Martini.

Hilda looked at him quickly.

'Is it not better that he should care?' she said. 'He used to be so indifferent. But for some time, ever since my illness last year, I think, I have felt sure that he is not indifferent any longer. If my child had lived, he would not have placed any obstacles in the way of its being brought up a Catholic. He would never break his promise.'

'Do you want him to break it?'

Hilda started slightly at the question.

'No,' she replied. 'It must be my doing; I want to absolve him from it. Nobody but I can do so; but I can, can I not, Monsignore?'

'You can do so—yes,' replied Monsignor Martini slowly, 'by abandoning the faith in which you have been brought up.'

'By leaving the Church?'

'By leaving the Roman Church. Under no other circumstances could you absolve your husband from his promise. As I understand it, the Roman Church in England exacts a pledge from those who make a mixed marriage that all the children of the marriage shall be baptized and brought up Roman Catholics. It appears to me to be not only a very intolerant exaction, but also a very short-sighted policy; but I am not of your nation.'

Hilda leaned back in her chair with a sigh.

'I dare say that you cannot understand,' she said presently. 'My husband naturally dislikes the idea of his name and estates passing into Roman Catholic hands. He is devoted to Abbotsbury, and all the people there are devoted to him; and besides, there are family traditions to which I am sure he clings, more

especially after the experiences which he has had of Catholicism since he married me. Why should a son not be brought up in his father's faith, Monsignore? When that faith is a Christian one, what can it matter? This exaction on the part of the Church in England is of very recent origin. A few years ago Walter's sons would have been brought up members of the Church of England, and his daughters in their mother's religion.'

'But what leads you to suppose that Lord Redman has any stronger feelings on the subject than he had when he married you?' asked Monsignor Martini.

'I know it,' replied Hilda. 'I cannot tell you how. Walter is so loyal that he never would speak to me on the subject unless I forced him to do so. But, all the same, the thought of the future is troubling him. Perhaps the birth of our stillborn son brought things home to him. I cannot tell, but I often think that his indifference to religion gradually left him after that. You have seen so much of him since we have been in Rome, Monsignore, and no doubt he has talked to you more openly than he has felt able to do to me.'

She paused, and looked at the priest almost wistfully. Monsignor Martini moved uneasily in his chair. At last he got up and walked to the window, where he stood looking out on to the little garden with its wealth of banksia roses. In all his career as a priest he did not recollect having been confronted by so difficult a problem. He had become strangely interested in this English couple, and he felt that he possessed the key to the psychological state of both the husband and the wife.

'Your husband has talked to me—yes,' he said presently; 'and you are right, Lady Redman, his

indifference has given place to another state of mind. He never was really indifferent. Many men are like that. In order to escape from the fetters of dogmatic belief, they feign a general scepticism which they are far from feeling. Sometimes God supplies a motive for belief, and their scepticism vanishes. As I have told you before, your husband will never be a Catholic; of that I am convinced. Our system is not adapted to such as he.'

'But he will have a stronger faith in the teaching of the Anglican Church,' exclaimed Hilda. 'It is the Church of his forefathers,' she continued; 'the form of faith to which he nominally belongs. That is what I am longing for, Monsignore; it would make me so happy, you do not know how happy. And then,' she murmured softly, as though speaking to herself, 'when his child comes it will lead him nearer to the God in whom he already believes, and they will be united.'

She rose from her seat, and came towards the priest.

'Monsignore,' she continued, laying her hand upon his arm, 'I cannot have the child baptized a Catholic. Do you hear?—I will not! They tell me that I am no longer a Catholic. I do not know; but I do know that I will not allow the Church to separate my child from its father. I believe that, as you said just now, God will supply to my husband a motive for increasing his faith. Can any motive be stronger than that of Nature? And I will further that motive—if it cost me my own soul, I will further it! You are a priest, but you are not like the others—you have not allowed your priesthood to crush your humanity. Tell me if I may do this thing for my husband's sake. I want your

advice, for I know that you will not deceive me as the others did.'

Monsignor Martini turned towards her, and his eyes shone with a great compassion.

'I cannot advise you,' he exclaimed abruptly. 'I will not. You should not ask it of me, Lady Redman.'

Hilda drew back from him.

'I beg your pardon, Monsignore!' she said a little bitterly. 'I forgot. Of course you cannot advise me to lose a soul to the Church.'

Monsignor Martini was silent for a few moments.

'I dare not advise you,' he said very gently, as Hilda did not speak again. 'I can only do my duty as a priest of the Roman Church by reminding you of the claims of that Church. You must seek counsel and advice from a higher authority than mine—from a higher than the Church herself. Go to God. He will direct you, for He is above all Churches. If your motives are good, He will pardon all that there may be in your action which is against the tenets of a branch of His Church. A grave responsibility lies upon you. Your action must be guided by your Maker. No priest can counsel you truly; we are all of us fallible human beings, and we are bound to advise in the interests of our respective religions. And of all priests I am the last to whom you should come for advice. To me, all who seek to do Christ's will, all who strive to make the world a happier and a better place, are members of His Church. You must remember that because I believe this, because I have counselled conciliation and tolerance, I am coldly looked upon here in Rome—that I am forbidden to preach in the Roman

diocese. Therefore, I do not presume to advise you as a Catholic priest, and I tell you frankly that my advice to you would not be such as a Catholic priest could give, were you to approach him officially under the seal of confession.'

'I know,' replied Hilda. 'I am not likely to forget what has been said to me by every priest to whom I have spoken on the subject except yourself,' and she shuddered a little.

'Have you told your husband that you would not have your child brought up a Catholic?' asked Monsignor Martini.

'Yes, I have told him, and I also told Mr. Russell. I think that until the latter heard me say so he always believed that I had converted his wife.'

'And what did Lord Redman say?'

'He would not talk about it. He told me to consult you; but oh, Monsignore! the look on his face told me better than any words what he thought. Has he spoken to you about it?'

'Yes,' answered Monsignor Martini, 'he has. It is his having done so which makes it so impossible for me to give you any advice beyond that which I have already given. Your husband had a long conversation with me on the subject. It was more in the nature of a confession than a conversation, and as such I regard it. While failing to persuade him of the truths of Catholicism, I believe that I have been the means of leading him to recognise some of those truths which are common to all forms of Christianity, and I am satisfied with this result.'

Hilda looked at him intently.

'Monsignore,' she said earnestly, 'will you answer

me one question—not as a priest, but as a Christian to whom all creeds are paths to the same end?'

'I will answer you as such a man would answer,' replied Monsignor Martini simply.

'Do you believe the knowledge that his children were to be Protestants would prevent Walter from relapsing into unbelief? Do you believe that it would be for his happiness here and hereafter?'

The colour left Monsignor Martini's face, and he hesitated for a moment; but it was for a moment only, and then his eyes glowed with a strange, soft light.

'I believe that it would,' he said solemnly.

A sudden emotion seemed to overpower Hilda, and she sank back in her chair and closed her eyes. As she opened them Monsignor Martini was watching her with a calm, benevolent smile in his eyes. Then the recollection of those other eyes which she had seen in St. Peter's that morning—the keen, cold eyes of the Pope—flashed across her, and she closed her own again, as though to shut out their penetrating gaze. As she did so she thought that Monsignor Martini made the sign of the cross over her.

And when she looked again she was alone.

CHAPTER XXV

IT was summer again at Abbotsbury. The corn-fields in the Trent Valley were ripening to harvest, and a hot, quivering haze hung over the land and shrouded the silent woods.

Hilda Redman was lying on a couch which had been wheeled beneath the shade of a great lime-tree standing a few paces from the house. Myriads of bees were at their work overhead among its blossoms, and the drowsy humming of their wings resounded in the sweet-scented air. It was the season when Nature hides her tragedies out of sight, when the restless life of spring and early summer gives place to the calm content of maturer days, and to the peaceful enjoyment of hopes which have been realized.

'How happy everything is!'

Hilda looked round her with a little sigh which had nothing but satisfaction in it, and then her glance rested upon Walter, who was sitting near her, idly turning over the leaves of a book.

'And you—you are happy too, are you not?' he asked gently.

'Ah, yes!' she answered, 'happier than I have ever been in all my life. I think there is nothing now that can divide us—you, me, and baby,' she added softly—'nothing but death; and even that will not divide us

for long. We shall all lie together—there;' and she looked across the lawn and over the brilliant flower-beds to where the gray walls of Abbotsbury Church nestled among the trees. 'It used to trouble me so much—that thought,' she continued, as if to herself.

'What thought, Hilda?'

'Why, that we should be separated—in this world and in the next. They used to tell me so, Walter; and it seemed so unjust, so cruel.'

Walter Redman smiled.

'It was a lie,' he said to her; 'they told you many lies in those days.'

'Yes; there was only one who ever told me the truth.'

'Ah! Monsignor Martini,' said Walter. 'He is one of those men whose minds soar above creeds. You do not regret what you have done, Hilda?' he added, drawing his chair closer to his wife's couch.

'Regret it? No,' replied Hilda. 'Tell me, Walter,' she continued, 'are you not glad to feel that nobody can come between you and us—baby and me? I know that you are, but I like to hear you say it. That is foolish of me, is it not?' and she smiled at him.

Walter Redman leaned towards her.

'Listen, dear!' he said. 'I never told you, but, after your confinement last year, the thought that our child, had it lived, must be brought up a Roman Catholic became intolerable to me. It was not the Catholic religion which I had learned to hate; it was the intolerance, the deceit and the dishonesty of the individual Catholics by whom you were surrounded, and who were the cause of so much suffering to you. I was glad the child was born dead, and I would rather have

had no son to come after me than feel that those hypocrites had succeeded in getting hold of Abbotsbury.'

'Not my mother, Walter!' interposed Hilda hurriedly. 'She was not to blame. You must remember that my grandmother is an absolute fanatic. My mother never dared oppose her.'

'No,' returned her husband; 'I do not blame your mother. It is such converts as Lady Merton, and those who work upon their superstitions, who bring Catholicism into disrepute with all who are liberal-minded, and with all who believe that God is Himself, and not the vindictive human monster which many delight to picture Him.'

'They will never forgive me, Walter!' said Hilda, and a cloud passed over the sunshine in her face as she spoke.

He bent over her tenderly.

'Need you care whether they do or not?' he asked.

A servant came towards them from the house, bringing the afternoon post and London newspapers.

'Here is one from Russell,' said Walter, looking through a small pile of letters which were addressed to him. 'I wish he would reconsider his determination to resign the living,' he added as he opened it. When he had read the letter, he passed it to Hilda. 'Poor fellow!' he said; 'but I dare say he is right.'

Mr. Russell persisted in his intention to retire from Abbotsbury. He could not, he wrote to Lord Redman, continue to be Rector of the parish after his wife's secession from the Church whose minister he was. There was, moreover, another reason which would make it impossible for him to remain at Abbotsbury Rectory. Lady Redman's decision to have her newly-

born son baptized a member of the Church of England, thereby practically severing herself from the Roman communion, would, he felt sure, be the cause of much bitterness on the part of his wife, who was very enthusiastic in the cause of her new faith. He did not intend, therefore, to expose Lady Redman to the unpleasantness which could hardly fail to occur between the two houses should he continue to live at the Rectory.

Hilda handed the letter back to her husband with a sigh.

'I am sorry,' she said, 'but I think he is right. Mary Russell's presence here would be disagreeable for all of us. But what a true gentleman Mr. Russell is, Walter,' she continued—'a true gentleman and a true Christian. There is not a word of blame or reproach of his wife in his letter; no complaint at being forced to give up his work and his home. To the last he thinks of others before himself. How could she do it?' she added indignantly—'how could she?'

Lord Redman shrugged his shoulders.

'My dear Hilda!' he remarked; 'as Ned Shirley says, "Religion is a very curious thing."'

'It is not religion,' exclaimed Hilda contemptuously; 'the religion has been all on her husband's side.'

The sun was sinking down behind the woods of Redman's Cross; the evening breeze came rippling over the pastures and rustled through the ancient oaks of Abbotsbury.

Hilda rose from the sofa upon which she was still obliged to pass the greater part of the day.

'I will walk a little before going indoors,' she said.

With Walter by her side she crossed the garden to

the old gateway leading into the churchyard. The doors of the church stood open, and, as though moved by a common impulse, they entered the building. The last rays of the setting sun were streaming in through the painted windows, casting strange lights upon the marble figures of the dead and gone Redmans. A solemn stillness seemed to possess the place, broken only by the soft notes of the wood-pigeons in the trees without. Hilda advanced slowly till she reached the altar rails, and there she sank upon her knees and prayed.

A touch on her hand roused her, and, raising her head, she saw that her husband was kneeling by her side.

THE END

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